His One Self
Ann Nicole

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Prologue

I didn’t sit with a red pen and clean it up.
didn’t try to make it sound fancy or smart.
because the truth doesn’t always sound beautiful.
Sometimes it stutters. Sometimes it breaks.
and so did I.

I wrote this in the middle of late nights,
in between silence and tears,
when my hands were shaking and my heart was too full.

I didn’t write it to show off.
I wrote it to breathe.
to survive.
to hold onto something before it disappeared.

So yeah, you’ll find mistakes.
a lot of them, probably.
but those mistakes—they’re mine.
and maybe they tell the story better than perfect words ever could.

Maybe it’s not perfect, but it’s mine.

and if even one part of it speaks to you,

then maybe none of it was wasted.

Chapter 1

I should have waved dad through the ground window.Then what would I even do, Mr.Martin was standing there.They were once colleagues. If he finds out I am my dad's daughter then he would eventually become my parents' spy to keep an eye on me in the school; you know there are some parents like that.For me it would become even more worse. Being the daughter of a school teacher and ranking within the last 10 of the class is not easy to handle. I don't want to grow the teachers list of saying "I know this girl; useless."

Every student starts their new year of school with a motto and my motto for every year is *stay out of everything you could in the school.* And I think that's why some teachers make me stand out of the class sometimes.But no worries; because this year 8th grade is scheduled to have the same school timing as high school due to the undergoing construction phase of the school. So we will be meeting new teachers.

On regular days I leave home early for school. But today I wanted to be late cause it was the first day of school and I was sure that the morning rituals for starting a new year of school would include speeches, prayer which would obviously not make me feel anything special about the day.So I entered the room when everyone was already in there but luckily our teacher hasn't reached the classroom yet. The most surprising thing about the first day of school is to know which teacher is going to be your class teacher for the new year. But then when I arrived at the class I saw everyone; looking so frustrated, some seemed to complain, some trying to understand the situation with a wise-like expression on their face. But the most noticeable part was all of them were standing and no one was sitting down.

Then I heard the girls from the first bench; this year we are going to share our classroom with the students from third grade.So benches and tables for the classroom are selected to be comfortable for third graders.The tables are as tall as our knees, so when we sit on a bench our knees stab to the table. I started to search for my friends or anyone whom I could share a seat with.

I saw Rosie standing at the third row, I just took two steps and saw everyone was straightening themselves. Then I turned back at the door without thinking anymore. I just pulled myself backward from where I was standing. Two more students I didn't realize standing at my left did the same thing. A slim average height young adult look-like lady just walked by us wearing a black jeans and a white cotton top with orange colored tree branches and leaves print; slamming a slight air containing unknown floral scent on our face.I was looking down so that she dont remember me as the first girl to see at the start of her new class. I took a right turn and stepped to the first row of benches before her reaching the class desk. I shoved my backpack on the first bench of the row and stood beside the table.I haven't seen her in the school before. But this school has two shifts from last year and we just turned to the morning shift from this year as we started 8th grade. That means we are going to meet a bunch of new teachers this year. My heart was being thrown on the thought of the unknown personality of the teacher. She

had a straight smile on her face which I didn't notice at first. I hope this is going to be a good sign of her personality being positive.

She held her left hand up with her carry bag one step away from the table and kept the bag on the desk calmly and walked in front of the table; stood leaning back to the table.She still had the smile on.

“Good Morning everyone. I am Miss Lily. I’ll be your class teacher from today.” she says.

Everyone wished her a good morning and so did she. The atmosphere was quite good now. So one of the students from the first bench gathered the courage to say something about the situation . While the girl was explaining everything, Ms. Lily was looking straight at the girls with pressing her lips.

“I was expecting that. But it is not a good way for you all to react,“ MIss Lily says, crossing her hands. “As you all know about the reconstruction of the school building, we only have 13 classrooms to divide into 30 class groups. That’s why the schools need to go for two shifts so that it would be easy to divide the rooms. but even in a shift some class groups have to share the same classroom in the same shift . And comparin to them you all are lucky that you got a whole class room all yours” Her right eyebrow was sticking up and mouth was slightly open.

Whole room was silent for a second but it was only limited to the walls . The sounds of cycles and cars on the road were still continuing without caring about the seriousness of the situation.

Suddenly Jane stood up . She was sitting beside a window "We are sorry, MIss Lily. we shouldn’t have reacted like that." She says, looking down at the table, keeping her hands together. It's a clear action of what the first girl of a class group would do in this kind of circumstances.

“What was your name again?” Ms. Lily asked, pointing a finger at her, pouting a little.
“Hi ma'am I’m Jane Park” she says with a polite smile.
“Are you the newcomer related to Ms. Lara?” Pushing the table to stand straight, keeping the right hand on her waist, mouth open in mid circle shape with eyebrow raising.
“Yes ma’am”

Jane park is originally from south korea but she was raised in Japan and now for her dad's job her whole family has shifted to Taiwan. Ms. Lara is her father’s elder sister and the head of the discipline committee in St. Angela’s Girls’ School.In this school every average student or low ranked students consider the high achievers a tough nut to break. For them it has become a rule among average students to avoid those girls. But unlike those types of girls Jane Park treats everyone casually, and it is not; she does that strategically, it's just built in her. She joined the school in the middle of last year. Generally it is not common so everyone thought she is just a bare minimum score keeping student. It’s been a long time for her in this school, but she's already earned the badge of basketball team captain and won 3 internal region matches.

A girl from my right row pokes on my arm twice and I look at her with tired eyes, but she turns to her back before me and gestures her hand to Rosie. I was so into the conversation that I forgot to look around. Rosie mouthed me to go over there to sit beside her after Ms. Lily's class. I showed a thumbs up to assure her.

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"You have arrived late today" Rosie says
"Yes I did. I didn't want to attend the morning exercise."
Me, Rosie and Sally, we have been introducing ourselves as a friend group for the last three years. But yet we haven't done anything like the girl friends group does normally.We didn't sleep over at each other's house, we don't go anywhere after the school.we don't share about our personal lives, we don't even talk about anything but school and study.

"Loren, Do you want to exchange seats?" Rosie asks.
Loren is sitting beside Sally infront of us. Rosie and I have been friends for 7 years so according to that calculation; we have known each other for 2 more years than Sally does. It is obvious to guess that our bond would be deeper than Sally. But in reality we both do *silent-fights* to be with Sally.I don't like to show that I get jealous when they do something without me so I just try to be normal when they want to do things together without me.Sally is the perfect girl who is admired by all even by our parents. Actually my mom asked me to be friends with her then I just one day got to interact with her when Rosie didn't come to school. But the next day I see Rosie and Sally talking and laughing even though it was their first time meeting.

Loren agreed to exchange seats.

"Hi Suzy." Loren says, leaning her backpack beside the table.
"Hi." I say smiling and pressing my lips.
" I saw you the other day in the church corridor. Were you waiting for someone?"
"Oh yeah, I was waiting for my brother to get back home together."
" I thought you were seeing a guy from the boy's school" Loren says, turning her pages in her notebook.

Loren is the kind of girl, seeks dating gossip.I lean back cross my arms over my chest seeing the floor down my left side wondering if she saw anything on the fair day.

***

A man with his messy hair; done by the pedestal fan behind him, was wearing a blue shirt untucked , formal pants with a pair of black slippers in a red curtained tent decorated with fairy lights, telling a story that shows we have an unlimited universe. People came here to listen to the story alone as they all seated; keeping one-two chairs distance between each other. I click a picture without making any noise.The man looks straight at me while turning his head to the right.Even though I can sense his staring I pretend not to know and turn to the back to move the curtain over me to get out of the tent with the hope of not getting called by him. I have been

chosen to be a photographer with some other girls also so that the school gets to choose pictures of rare moments like the one I just clicked.It’s 5 pm and the fair is soon going to end. So I decided to leave early as I am tired of taking pictures all day. Now I need to go and collect some white papers to stick these photos on to submit it to the fair managing club. The fair is the partnership initiative between St. Angela’s Girls’ School and St. Gregory’s Boys’ School.For this students from both schools are allowed to choose their stall spot in any of these schools. Sally got an invite from a year younger girl to support her in her stall. The young girl is the boy’s younger sister who has a crush on Sally.And this information I got to know from Loren today. I am planning to sneak into the boys’ school to see the boy.

But first I need to stop by a stationary shop For the white papers.I bought the papers from the corner shop at the one end of our school wall.I cross the road the street‘s become so jam-packed for the visitors of the fair I need to stand for some minutes to walk again. A Group of boys were standing in front of the church gate with their cycles. I only recognize one of them. I saw him in some christian students' activities.His name is Wayne,he is my age .Then I suddenly realize while I am looking at him he looks straight to me. My eyes just widen and the second, I move my eyes away from him. Holding my breath, pursing my lips, I scream, making a tiny sound even, people around me don't listen. Luckily everyone started walking again. It’s never happened to me before. So I am afraid to look back to check if he is looking at me.I took four two or more steps.the boy group just get on their cycle and started racing.I look up Wayne is leading the race but suddenly he turned back and looking straight in my direction, i am also looking at him this time I don't look away, no sound is coming to me,I feel my eyebrows bending in the though is it supposed to happen or Its just the influence of reading a lot of romance genre. I want to face it. A call of his name comes from behind him. It's one of the boys, pointing at the road in front of Wayne. He looks and stumbles a little with his cycle, stopping himself from falling by his left leg landing on the street. He was about to bump into the back of a truck that didn't move because of the crowd.After that I found myself walking to my house instead of going to check on Sally.

***

We need to part our ways in the crossroads.For my house take the right side while Rosie and Sally take the left road.It is the same road I'm walking now. In front of the church, I am on the same side of the road ,but he is not there.Everyday this road reminds me of that incident. It’s been 3 months only.But I didn’t get to see him again after that evening.I want to see him again to see if the restless feeling again goes through me or not. I want to be sure of that.I don’t go to any of the places he goes unless there is a church. I looked for him in the church on christmas eve, it was the only day i was sure of him visiting.But he might have come on a different scheduled mass.

“Did you check on him that day?”The voice stuttered. It’s Loren. My breath stuck half way, teeth chatter slightly.The words really making me sick. Does she know about me thinking about Wayne?
“Suzy? Are you okay?” she asked, frowning a little.

I take a breath out and say “Yeah.Actually I didn't get you?”
“I was asking, did you see the boy that day? I didn’t get to ask after that day.”
“Which boy?”
“The boy Sally is dating, you said you will go on your way home to the school to see him.”
“Oh I was tired that day so I just went home.” Taking out a breath of relief.Then I blink back “they are dating?”
“Yes. Sally didn’t tell you.” Loren says , smirking “what kind of friends you are , don't know about each other's life.”
“We just don't like to share our personal life.But how do you know about their dating? ”
“Are you dumb Suzy? Can’t you see how Mia comes everyday and whispers with Sally. And Mia is the boy’s younger sister, who invited Sally to join her on the fair day." Loren says with raising her left eyebrow and pushing her lip to the right.
My lips separate and I look at her right to find out what to say.
“Do you want to go today to see the guy?” she says, raising her eyebrows, parting her lips, pulling her chin down.
Loren is always excited about these types of things.I have been her bench partner for the past year. And all the time she got free time she only talked about the rumors,dating, crushes.I was really updated with these news about the girls of our school the entire last year.And she only shared these talks with her bench partner. But now we have started our new grade,she should have waited for her new bench partner as Ms.Daniel hasn’t given us our bench partner for this year.
“No. I am going home” I say, taking a step and blinking away.
“Why are you always going home? Don’t you want to see your friend’s boyfriend.” lifting her left side of upper lip. I’m not asking you specially because I can’t go on my own. It's just the boy who lives in this lane and I need you to guide me.”
“You could ask anyone in the street for the way”
“Suzy”Loren says, calling my name with her low voice. “You know I really like to share the stories with you and you are the only one who listens to me in a way that makes me say more.” tilting her head to the left, holding my left arm. “Please, please,please.” shaking my arm three times.
“Okay. I am going. But you need to promise me you are not going to involve me in your talk with anyone.Just imagine me as a statue.”
“Okay, done.” Loren says, beaming at me.

Michel Heights

It’s really at the opposite turn from my house road.The area is really silent. I could only see cars and sometimes a few people were walking by. Now we both have arrived and I don't know what Loren is going to do.

“Tell me something, is there any chance you like the boy whom Sally is dating” I ask .I hear my heart beating what if she says yes.
‘What? No. Suzy, you are behaving so weird today.”She put her left hand on my shoulder and said “I am not going to settle for these boys.They dont fit in my standards.” looking up at the building.
“Now what do you want to do, just do it and let’s go. The road is a bit scary.” I say forming circles with my right hand .
Loren turns her side to me and says “Be ready to listen to what I am going to say.” She moves to her right making a one arm distance between us. “My brother Lio is now at that boy’s house and they are all in the basketball team and for their upcoming match my brother asked me to come over to this boy’s house to make posters and if you could come with some friends it would be good.”
I feel like I am about to cry and with every light breath heat radiating from the back of my neck. I turn and start to walk.
“Suzy don't go.” “ There will be other boy’s sisters too.” Loren says holding me from behind.
“Loren, you know I have never gone to any unknown people’s house to just know and meet new people. I am not good at these things. But still you didn’t tell me.”
“It's going to be okay Suzy. Just give it a try.” She says, nodding towards me to say yes.

***

Loren presses the bell. A thin voice of a lady is coming from behind the door. She might be the mother of the boy. The way I have come to search and see the boy I hope it would be worth something with drinks and snacks.The door opens.the lady is holding the door knob and raising her eyebrows to ask us the reason for coming.

“She is my sister.She came for the poster work” It's Lio.
Lio and Loren both are twins .But looking at their height difference it doesn’t seem.

“Oh come, come.” The lady says, gesturing her hand to the inside.

We both smile at her and come inside.

“You both come with me.” Rio says.
The hallway to the rooms .The hallway gets divided into two after stepping from the living room to the start of the hallway.
“Has anyone come already?” Loren asks.
“Yes. Jack’s sister came with her friends.”
It means we are not alone. It calms me down .I took a quick breath so no one could notice I was nervous.A wooden box is beside the bedroom door filled with colors , brushes and poster papers.We picked what we needed. Lio pushes the door with his finger tip exposing a little bit of what is happening inside. I take a quick scan and my eyes just get stuck on one person .The person was smiling . Looking at her smile it makes my heart beat go up. The door closes as Leo uses his hands to gather the stuff's loren drops.I look around to find something which could help me to go out of this place.without thinking I just grab loren and pull her back.

“Sally is here. In the room”
“What? Loren says frowning and opening her mouth in the sad lips formation.”See, we got the proof.”
“I don’t think I can go inside.What she would think is that I didn’t tell them that I am going to a boy’s house when I have never gone to their house.” I say lower my head.
“It’s not new Suzy, you are the one who said all 3 of you don't share things with each other.”
“But still it is different. What if she tells my mom?”
“Then you could tell her mom too.” Loren says with her straight face.”Now come on. We will get to see a lot of things happening inside today.”

She opens the door. I don't want to show that I am doing something wrong. But I am not. I just came for the poster. I have an answer to give.I keep a slight smile while entering the room and take a look in front of the opposite of where Sally is sitting and then My eyes on her eyes I lift a brow still keeping a smile and say “Sally?”

Sally is looking at me without making a word out of her mouth.She parts her mouth more to say something but doesn't. Then she blinks, shakes her head and asks “You here?”

“Yeah, I….”
“She came with me and I just dragged her from the street.” Says Loren.
“Oh….” Sally says looking back at her poster.
We just ignored the fact that a few moments ago we knew that we're going home but now we meet again.

***

I don't know what words would be good to cheer the boys for the match so I just color the area which needs to be after Loren makes an outline on the poster paper. It’s really weird when you need to do any physical work. You just get invested in the work,you and your thoughts, forgetting what else is happening around you. I am now doing the last poster after this we will leave. Loren’s done her part of work. She is just observing Sally and Jack from their back, to pass her time.I gesture her to come to me.

“I need to wash up” I say, showing both my palms to her.
She looks away and calls her brother “We need to use the washroom?”

“It is at the end of this hallway on your left.” Lio says .

We find a girl, mostly a 4th grader, scrubbing to pull out red paint on a black shoe. She is wearing our school’s dress.I ask Loren if she knows her. But she didn’t.I use the other sink to wash my hands.She is really doing it with her full strength. It makes me want to show a generous elder girl side to a cute little girl.

“I can help with it.” I say opening my hand to receive it.
“No, no . It’s okay for me.” The girl says looking down at the shoe.
“I can do it better “ I say, taking the shoe from her to the other sink.

It is really taking my strength to scrub it off.The girl is standing beside me. I think she is also like me,and doesn't talk a lot.Then it’s really a comfortable spot for me. I do like to talk with people who’s also introverted . Because it doesn’t make me worry about how they'll treat me, I already know they won't do those things which I actually hate.

“Whom did you come with?” I ask her in a normal mature tone.
“With my brother. It’s actually his shoe. I dropped that red paint,but he doesn't know. I Think he will eventually know because the shoe is already wet.” She says with a half tensed feature on her face.”

“Zara. What are you doing there? Come we need to go “ Suddenly a low voice started to speak behind me.It’s her brother.I tried to do it with more strength to get it out quickly.

“I was…..” Zara says.
“Oh it came off” I say, pulling my both hands in with the shoe and scrubber.I take a quick turn to my left, I smile keeping two finger gaps between my lips. Untucked hair from my right came on my face. And seeing the boy make me realize my smile is fading , eyes blinking . He is looking at Zara. Seeing me turn he closes and opens his eyes on me.These are the eyes I stared into 3 months ago. It’s my second time meeting his eyes.Everything still feels smooth while looking at his eyes.He is lifting his right hand and grabs the shoe in my left hand. Take it away and hide it behind him.

“Why did you make her do it?” he asked, tilting his head slightly to see Zara behind me.
“She wanted to help me.” Zara says.

He is looking down to the floor, then says “Sorry for the trouble.”
It feels nice to be respected by a guy whom you didn’t even start talking to. He placed his right foot on the washroom floor beside my half left foot .His head is right beside my arm.He takes his sister's hand and walks her towards him. I turn to the sink and wash my hands. I need to see him more so that I can keep him in my memory until I can meet again.Everyone is already in the living room.Loren is sitting at the one head of the table. I took a seat beside her for the meal Jack’s mother prepared for us.Jack’s mother made Wayne sit with us and try the meal.

***

The sun is already setting. We all have come out from the Michel Heights, now we are walking in a group. The area is only listening to our voice.I see Wayne and her sister walking on the other side of the road. It feels like he also avoids people.But he is talking with Loren’s brother

about the match.We see the crossroads from here we will part our ways. I wave to Loren and Sally, both of them. I cross the street .

“Suzy” Girl’s voice shouting my name. I turn and it's Jane Park.
“Why are you still in school dress?” keeping her left hand on her waist.
“I needed to go somewhere”.
“Let’s walk together.”

Jane lives a couple blocks after my house. We often bump into each other.A hand goes through my hand I look and it’s Zara. Wayn is standing behind her, his hands in pant pockets.He looks at Zara and blinks to look at me.

“Can we help in some way?” Wayne says. His low voice literally gives me goosebumps.
“We can get you any snacks if you want” Zara says, beaming at me.
“No,no I am fine.” I am really happy to have him turned down. I feel valued from a boy and it’s Wayne.
“Aren’t guys getting late.Where do you live?” I ask straightly looking at him.Pressing my lips.

“Suzy, I think I forgot something at the store. I better go and get that” Jane says. She rubs my back waves to me, runs a little then starts walking fast.
“I think we should go now, come Zara.” Wayne says without answering me, takes Zara and walks towards the crossroad.

Chapter 2

Sr.Grace is our vice principal. She got transferred from our school when I was in 2nd grade.After six years she again got transferred back here.I didn't know she was here and unknowingly joined her club.Three days ago I saw a notice about opening a new club. A field club included washing horses,cutting grasses,and taking care of the flowers in the garden. If someone would ask me which fictional animal do you think could be real, my answer will always be horse. Because just like today's kids, if you show some dinosaur picture and say nothing, they will think it's a fictional animal. But it actually existed. When I first saw a 3d unicorn I thought it was an extinct breed of horse and believed for many years that they were once real. And when I saw the word horse on that notice I straight went to sign up for the club.Now Sr. Grace is showing her skills of washing a horse.It's a mongolian horse. Seeing the horse made me realize I don't like all the types of horses. Before starting to demonstrate the horses she told the story of why she wanted to start this club.The reasons were all predictable.She wanted the girls to meet nature and wanted the horse to get care from young hands.I really don't believe the words she say are all she meant.

***

I didn't want to wake up today. It's 7.00 am. After 30 minutes my mom has to leave for her school. She is a teacher in Rising High School. Me and my brother were studying up until the 6th month of this year.But my mom thought it would be nice to bring them to a crowded school like this. In a section they have 80 students. Now we are standing in a line for the final viva exam to get moved to the first grade from baby school..My dad can stand here for the whole day until i take my exam. They both wanted to come with me.To see how the worst student their daughter is.They just checked the line progress from time to time.

"I think I am going to be late. I should leave. I already got two calls from my seniors." My mom says looking up to my dad.
" Then go, I am here with her." Dad says placing her right hand on my left shoulder.

My mom leaves wishing me the best and setting my hair on my forehead. We still need to wait alot to get our chance.

" You can come now" A school helper says, pointing at me.
I really don't want to come. I want to go home. I step into the class. A lady in a white frock writing something on the paper comes to my view. She looks at me smiling a little with her tired eyes . She is wearing glasses hanging on the middle of her nose.

"What is Your Name?" she asks. I look at my dad . He is grinning towards me.
"My name is Suzy Rozario."
"Where is your mom?" Sister asks, raising her eyebrows.

I look at my dad again. He is mouthing me to say my mom is at her job. But I didn't say anything. Sister shakes her head and presses her lips in dissapointment.
My father is frustrated and says, keeping a smile, " Say your mother is at work."
"Okay now tell me, where is your dad?" Sister asks. This time she said the words slowly.

I can fully understand what she was asking but why she was asking can't she see my dad is beside me still she is asking where he is i was just looking at him to indicate where he is. Then she ends the exam.And after that day i didn't like Sr. Grace at all.

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You could see magical skies when the sun was leaving the sky. The sky above me is now soft pink and violet coloured.It makes me stare at it as long as possible. There are no people around me.It is kind of satisfying.I am feeling like rolling down to play in the sand.I am sitting on a white horse. I don't have any idea what type it is. All this time he's been calm.I t made me feel special . I heard from someone that horses have the power to guess a person is good or bad and then treat them according to it. His calmness indirectly helped me to gain confidence to express myself as I got his approval about my nature.I see my body is covered with a silk dress specifically, party dress. I have never worn this before. If my mom somehow gets a hint about it then I won't be able to show my face to her again. My right leg is hanging naked as the dress I'm wearing is a leg slit dress. I don't know who dressed me up. A veiny hand runs through my waist. I didn't even realize I was with someone. The skin of the hand is really tough as though if i Press it with my full strength he's not going to feel anything. My head is sliding at his right shoulder, my eyes are closed. I am so nervous to face him. He moves my face with his hand and rubs his nose against my right cheek. I still don't have the courage to open my eyes.A sudden trembling I clench my hands, nails hurting my skin.I hold my head from falling straight my back my pencil, pens, ruler are on the floor. My eyes are on Loren sitting beside me. Her right hand is on my left shoulder grabbing from behind.

"Are you sick?" Loren asks, placing her hand on my forehead to check. " Why are you suddenly sleeping in the class?" "keeping her lip part. "Couldn't you sleep last night?" forming her eyebrows in a circle ."Didn't you go for the club introduction?"

I move my eyes from Loren and see two girls seated at our front bench looking back at me. And two from behind keeping their crossed arms, holding all their weight on the table to help them see my face. I really need to say something to make them believe me.

I lick my lips, take a pause and say "I was just getting bored and didn't realise I just fell asleep."
"Why? What happened to your club?"Loren asks.
"I thought it would be fun, but I didn't get any and now I need to carry this on for 1 year.I wish Sr. Grace would cancel this club." I say staring out of the window. My heart is still pounding ,feeling the heat of shame in my skin. What I have just seen is really scary. What if someone else could see it.Everyone will laugh at me. We had a girl in our class who would just keep her head down and sing her song to take herself away from this classroom to any other beautiful place. But girls around her used to laugh at her. And I personally hated this thing about her cause she used to

give her false hope. But now I am being affected by false hopes, that it started showing in my dreams.I want to cry out my disappointment. I didn't want to make it this way inside me. I wanted to keep it pure. I am not feeling like pulling out my lunch box and eating . It feels like everyone is just gazing at me.

"Do you want some?" Loren asks. She must have thought I didn't bring my food."
I waved to her and smoothly pushed the box back.Then I noticed someone to make me feel more terrible. After having this dream I can't look at the girl again. I have never seen her come to this class before. She must have come to see me. But I don't want to make myself feel more miserable. I turn my head back to the window. I hope she doesn't find me.I t would have been more fun to talk to zara. I could have known more. And it was like a lucky opportunity . She walked to my class to meet me and the dream ruined it all.

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The sun is pouring on the left side of my face. My too long bangs parted in the middle shading my left eye .I am in the field again today. I don't spend a lot of time outside. So today was really surprising coming to the field, the dream. It makes me wonder if the time is processing to change my personality. It's already 1:30 pm. Jane asked me to wait for her.She wanted to go home together.Even though we share the same road to our house we have never gotten each other to go home.

Jane comes out from the sister's office gate. It is just at the side of the open field.She is wearing her basketball jersey, holding a water bottle.. She doesn't hang around wearing these like the girls full of hotness.I doubt if she is going home.

I keep a smile in silence,looking at her coming towards me.
"Are you going?" I ask
"I am sorry Suzy, I kept you waiting." Jane says,pulling her head a little down then seeing me with the top of her eyes.
"Oh.I understand i just caught seeing you in this before you say anything." I say.
"Suzy" she pauses. "I actually want to ask you if you got anything to deliver me."

The words make me stuck my eyes and head straight at her.Even though I know clearly I didn't get anything .I still roll my eyes to remember if There was any chance of it happening.

"I am supposed to?" letting a bit of air out with soft laughs to make it sound casual.
" A girl just came to me this morning and said she would give me a bag . Then she mentioned the time and I said I wouldn't be in the classroom. So she said she knows you and she would leave the bag to you to send me the bag" She says. She pauses while expressing the confusion with her lips folding and fingers spreading with each on top of the other.

I don't try much to think of anyone.I stick my eyes on grass to pretend I am thinking.

Then she says “Never mind”
I have already started to take steps.“Okay.I am leaving. Bye” I say.

She doesn’t say anything, she gives the sign with her hands.

***

I was afraid to sleep last night because of the dream. So I kept talking with my granny to sleep as late as possible.I don’t know when I fall asleep .But I am sure it must be because my eyes couldn’t get any energy and shut themselves. Once Ms.Perera told us that eyes are the most active sense .Each day you wake up your eyes roll to find you everything . After working all day they need to rest and shut then you sleep. I don't know If science accepts this logic.But I accept this.

I tie my shoelaces, call my dad . He walks me to the school everyday. He says in this way he could have a morning walk.Otherwise he doesn't bother to treat his health well.Today I don’t have any special thing that could happen .But I am feeling fresh and nice. I think It is for last night’s decent sleep. I didn’t get that kind of dream which assures me I am still who I am.I still don’t know what happened to me the other day .It was as if someone just summoned me.

Rosie is talking with her benchmate. Her eyes sees me, she turns and waves me with a smile.I wave and go to my seat .Loren hasn’t come yet.I don’t know what others think of me but I don’t move easily after sitting in my seat.Most of the time , I spend my all day at one place. The view from here is nice.The classroom is on the third floor of the school building .Our school authority has multiple buildings and land attached to it,making the school area appear big. That's why at first glance you could only see the school area while standing in the school building. When you look up it makes you think it is far away from town. You could see the blocks of this neighbourhood. Each block has decorated their premises with some big trees which look like every two blocks have hills between them.Without much thinking you could say that you are seeing the hills.

I feel a grip on my left shoulder. I turn and see Loren still has her backpack on and falling on the seat beside me with her face beaming.I see her each eye at a time.

“What ?” I ask, frowning with a smile.
“I have something to tell you. You will jump to know that” Loren says,putting off the bag and keeping it on the floor.
“There is nothing new. You always have something to say, something to inform.And I always listen to it without getting excited.All the rumors you get are the same quality.But you still feel so enthusiastic to tell.”

She laughs a witch's laugh, side eyeing me, jumps her eyebrows. Her expressions say it’s really different this time. Now I am getting curious to ask.But if I immediately ask she will just make me

wait. She will delay it. She likes to play with others in this way. As long as I know it I am not going to let her use the trick on me. I just ignored her.
We have already completed our 3rd class.And Loren still remains so silent.She keeps talking about other things.But not the one that I want to hear.

“Suzy” an unexpected call from the left corner of the classroom. I look up. “Someone came to you”

I don’t have a lot of people to meet.For me only the girls from my grade know me. I move my head to see the person, some girls coming in the way.Ms.Young didn’t come yet.So the classroom is a mess .I finally see. I went up to talk to her.
“Sr.Grace asked me to drop it to Jane.” Zara says,I look at the mail envelope, I remember now Jane was asking about this.
“Did you come the other day also to deliver it?” I ask as I get the memory of her visiting the class the same day Jane asked me for the envelope.
“Yes.I couldn’t find you.” Zara says.I realize she is still holding the envelope in front of me. I take that.

I want to ask her about her brother.I need to think of something to make her tell her house address. I hear my voice calling. She is looking back at me. I walk to her.

“Where do you stay?” I ask her straight.She doesn't say anything. I am feeling embarrassed.But nothing I could do. “If you don’t want to say anything.It’s Okay.I just wanted to spend some time if possible.” It really makes me feel small to her. But she left like her brother that day. That shows they are really from the same blood.I am sensing that It is going to be hard to impress them.I nod to myself.

“What did she say?” Loren asks, drinking water.
“Nothing .She wants me to give Jane this.”
“Is it from her brother?” She asks.She comes closer to stand sticking with me and gets the envelope in her hand.
“It's from Sr.Grace.” For a second I really skipped listening to those words. “Her brother? Why did you ask for his brother? She is going through the envelope. I shake her up, grabbing her arm.
“Isn’t it obvious that young sisters come to send their brothers messages to their desired girls.” She pauses “Didn’t you see Mia and Sally.”

But Zara came with Sr.Grace’s Letter. Is there any possibility between them.I am breathing normally, suddenly it doesn’t feel enough. My face is smoothly weakening .It feels like they are falling.

“Uh…..” Loren says sticking the beneath part of her lower lip to her teeth,pushing the right corner of lips up. “It's a school sealed envelope.”

A relief follows her word through my body.The second I stand against the door as I am using the door to handle my body to fall on the ground.
“I think our school is losing money.” Loren says, flipping the envelope. “See the mouth side was torn. It means they are using the ruined one.” She straightens her hand to give the envelope back to me.

I take that and look at the torn part.I don’t think much. I go back to my seat.

Ms.Young finishes her class.Loren leans with her arm on table instantly Ms.Young leaves.As though she was conducting the class.

“It’s really painful sitting all the time here.” Loren says, hanging her head down to the table.
“Then join more clubs. You could stay out of the class all the time.” I say
“I did it and we both saw the result.”

As we both shared the bench last year.I used to see her only in the first two class and the last one beside me.Because she was always out doing teachers and school’s work for any upcoming events.Then one day she were in present in history class, unlike other days.So Mr. Jefer, our history teacher, saw her.

“I don’t see you in the class.Where do you go?” Mr.Jefer said,frowning at her.
Loren standed up,her hands together, blinked.I can only see Loren in front of teachers. “Actually, I need to be at the club room to schedule the upcoming work and submit the report of the work we have done.”
“Do you know how disrespectful it is to just ignore a teacher’s class for your other activities.”

The whole class were staring at her.She couldn’t make her head up.And the next day she got a letter from the principal, containing the order to not join more then one club in a year.It didn’t happen because one can’t join various clubs. It happened because after the class that day Mr.jefer checked Lorens academic records and got the ice proof and he sent it to the principal to eliminate her from the clubs.

“What did you get for today?” Loren asks.
“It’s two soft cream buns.” I say.
“Okay I can’t wait anymore.Come with me.”
“What?”
She pulls me.I barely stand, hit my feet to the chair table to come out from the seat with the pace of her pull. We are at the back of the classroom,standing against the window.She is at my right.

“The other day…” She is speaking at a level,only I could hear.
“The whole basketball team came to our house.And it was so unexpected. Me and my mother were watching the three guys show and the bell rang .It was 8.00 on the clock.We thought Lio came.But when I opened the door Lio came in and directed the way of his room with his hand to

the other guys.Lio said to mom he had something related to the match .We weren't allowed in the school this hour.So I just made our way here,while others just rushed to his room without seeing what was around them.I just got shocked.They closed the door and locked themselves up inside the room.Me and my mom were looking at each other.I didn't know what to ask so I just went to my room.My room is beside Lio's so I just stand keeping my hand on the the door knob,tried to listen their conversation.My brother was saying Hm..,hm……,hm on a phone call and everyone was silent.Then after he ended the call he said Wayne that he need to back off."

The moment at the bathroom with his shoe just flashed.I process the words Wayne….,Back…..,Off.My hands just lift up to catch Loren.

"What did you say?" I ask without blinking .
She scans me "what happend?" She asks.
I flare up my eyelids and say "Just keep saying."
"Okay.The main story is Jane park, basketball team captain's challenged the boys team to play a match.And Wayne was the one who accepted the challenge.But their principle isn't allowing it.So he started to keep him out of all the practices and meetups from everything linked with the game.
But they want him for the upcoming regional matches.And as a captain Lio got the responsibility to handle Wayne."

"Wayne was also there that day?" I ask
"I didn't notice".She says holding her head up to remember if she did "I told you all of them just walked wildly to the room."

I can clearly think now why Jane walked off the day Wayne with his sister came to talk to me.But he is being so harsh to look at a girl group in this way.He could have just ignored it.I was lost in the thoughts that I forget about the letter.I get my head up and walk fast to stop myself from running, look for the letter in my table drawer, I find it, flip it back and there it's written basketball club beneath the name of Sr.Grace.It could be something related to the situation.I don't know but seeing him getting involved with girls making me feel anxious kind of that you get at the car and can't hold it back. And you just want to rest your head with the window. I want to make a move, a step to make it redirected to something else.It's my first time being in a situation to face girls with the belief that the boy I like won't fall for any of them.

***

Jane suddenly got sick. So Sr.Grace just sent her home. She didn't come to class after she left for the activities.I couldn't give her the letter. Once I thought to leave it in her desk drawer, she would find it tomorrow.But what if it gets lost. So I decided to go to her house to give her. I ring the bell. I rub my dress off to avoid folds on it. Someone unlocks the door, a lady gets her head out, she is in a shirt and pajamas. She tightens her chin and sees me. I smile pressing my lips.

I was practicing the words all the way here. "Is it Jane's address?"
Before she says anything a voice appears "who is it mom?"

The lady doesn't answer her but comes out ,The door is open. “Yes it is”

I know this is. She just yelled out from inside.

“I need to give her this. That’s why I came.” I hold it to her. I look at her then the envelope then again at her. But she didn’t take it.
“Are you in the same grade?” Her look explains he asked that question to hear “Yes” back.
“Yes.” I pause. “Can you give it to her?”
She smoothly pulls me by my side and says “Come inside.Give it yourself?”
I can’t resist that. I have the urge to see Jane’s house, to see how a perfect girl lives her life, to see how her family is. So I came in.I sat on the couch. In my view the kitchen is straight from the front door. The left wall of the living room just gets divided as it creates a hallway. I could only see the bedroom door. Because from my place the full hallway isn't visible. Right beside the kitchen door is a showcase filled with trophies , medals and certificates. I don’t think it’s all Jane’s cause, most of them containing the name “Justin Park”. He could be her brother or father. The other walls are decorated with their picture frames. If I analyse then I think she doesn’t have any brother.The whole room floor is covered with floor mat. I wonder how they clean the surface. But I liked the matty floor. It looks like I am in a waiting area of a hotel. A golden chandelier is hanging in the centre of the ceiling. I am sitting here alone admiring the place.

“Suzy?” Jane comes out squinting her eyes, her hair is a mess, it doesn’t take long to know she was sleeping having a migraine pain.
I bend instantly, take the envelope from the table and stand as I see her. “I came to give you this.The other day you asked me about it. The girl came today.”
She comes to me looking at the envelope, picking it in her hand softly. “ You could have just left it on my desk.
“I thought you would need it.”
She releases her hands loose and looks at the table then me.
“Do you have anything to ask ?” I ask as I was getting tense if she would doubt me with the envelope.
“I wanted to say something about that boy”
Without even knowing my mouth says “Wayne?”
“That day when we met at the road and I just got to go catch my things in the middle, remember?.
I nod.
She continues.”The boy came behind me.I didn’t see his eyes.Even if I had met I would have ignored him cause we don’t know each other.But he suddenly from nowhere asked if I am the captain of the basketball team. I turned to him wondering it would be any information from any place for the game. And he said that if the girls are strong enough to have a battle with them.I t really felt like he has some problem, I just walked off without responding.Like who talks like that.”
She sighs.

Is this really Wayne? He was just talking fine with me before he left that day. Yes he has this stiff face on all the time.But I think it's just how his face was structured. Then again I don't fully believe Jane.Back at the classroom today Loren said Jane challenged the boy group. I am going through the consequences if I ask her about this. The news is not out yet to the school officially. I t;s just the related people know. If I mention to her suddenly about my update of her asking them to compete with her she could attack me with more questions. So I just drop the step.

"Then it's happening. I thought it was the boy being foolish and acting cool. But Today I found out it's their principal's thoughts. I met Sr.Grace and she told us that the both authorities had agreed to set a match between the girls' school and boys' school. It's to get to know the group's team spirit and interest in playing with the opposite gender. We trained so hard today that I couldn't bear to keep myself together." She says, leans against the couch.

I don't know what happened to the authority head that they are making such illogical ways to spend their days. They are always at something. They often come up with days of saints' birthdays, death anniversaries and 1st day of seasons with all other days that middle class families barely remember these as a day to celebrate. But they still need something more to make their day. Girls vs Boys.

Visiting Jane's house was nice though. Her mother offered a lot of snacks and sweets. She gave me a box of chocolate cookies . I still have two in my hand eating on my way home . I think I am not going to share it with my brother. But I need to , he saves the special foods for me sometimes. We have this tendency of food anxiety. We just can't wait for others to grab and eat. We just keep eating in the restless feeling of what if the other one gets the big bite. And my brother is the type of a person ,who openly screams if someone needs to share food with him and the person takes the big bite. I clearly dislike it. So to avoid it, sometimes I only eat the special food with one serving.But I always want more. It only applies to special food like Pizza, burgers, chicken sandwiches, and nuggets.

Chapter 3

The street light is being filtered through the curtains and slamming on the right side of my face brightening half of my face.My reflection is looking back at me. We all in a moment in our life realize the way the mirror shows us is not how we actually get looked at by others.The room is covered with darkness. I am sitting Leaning back, crossing my hands on my bed staring straight at the dressing table mirror. My mom was the one, selected the spots in my room.She set the dressing table right in front of my bed.I don't know what thoughts she put or it just happened to give the window spot to my study table and the free corner to my cupboard so that the doors could be easily opened. And the remaining spot was the corner in front of my bed. My grandma is already asleep beside me facing the door.I pretended to sleep until she was awake. I can't forget what I got to know about Wayne today.

I wait everyday to see him again to just get a glimpse of him.I only got chances to see him for a few rush seconds. I didn't have any brief moments with him unless I mention that evening.The moment in my mind didn't even save his voice to play it to me later whenever I want.But the description Jane gave me about him is really horrific. It pushes me to think of him as a person that wants her people to live their life according to him, to be serious with him, to just value him as a king.And if I ignore Jane and look at what Loren said, then Jane is lying about her interaction with Wayne. In this state I am a person to just leave it as it is and wait for anything else to happen and forget the boy Wayne. Whenever I think of forgetting him, the sight of him on cycle and looking back at me just pulls my heart to do something to save him for my future self to have.

***

I am supposed to leave for home. Still I am standing in front of our school's private basketball court.Maybe Jane is practicing with her teammates. I came here to follow my plan of *"keep love out of girls touch".* Last night I felt so miserable about not having any good side of me to use as a reason for having chances to meet Wayne. Just like Jane did. I woke up today and the miserable feeling just turned to defeat before I even tried to compete.And I was about to forget Wayne.Then Loren came running to me in the classroom.

I slightly smile the pretentious one to response her grinning

"Did you see that downstairs? The bom?" she asks, standing still, grinning on.
I frown and say "What?"
"The blast? The group? The notice board?" She asks, slamming herself into her chair, making it scream.
"Wha…….t?" I just tailed it.
She sways me.She screams in high pitch with her lips shut.
"You know this campus is associated with its original campus in America, right?" She asks.She waits with her soft smile, taking breaths gently.

“Yes” I say
She screams again in the same way.
“So ……. the ……..school …..”
“Hey did you get the notice that the school is going to send some of us to America for high school.” Eva says before Loren could complete her sentence, Eva usually seats at the front bench.
Loren throws her both fists on the table looking at Eva, like *how did you dare?*

I think I am the only person feeling neutral about it. It is so obvious that the school is going to send the first rankers, show up in everything, and stay active all day with a good percentage. And not one of these things describe me.

“Uff ….. Listen, the full story is yet to be told.” Loren says, moving my head front to side.
My expression stays stiff.
“The snatchy girl who got selected for the basketball team from the 9th grade missed the meeting the other day.And that day the coach got so furious that she called her parents right on the spot to eliminate her from the team. And now the team’s left with 10 days to their match with the boys. So the coach just asked Sr. grace if she could come up with something big to offer to make the girls get interested in being a temporary team member.”
“ I am still not getting what you want to say.”
She clicks her lips and says “Suzy….., you don’t understand anything. The rule is you need to register your name to your grade teacher then you’ll get called .You’ll be formed in a five non basketball player group and that group needs to compete with the basketball team.But the twist is the non basketball players group needs to snatch the ball as much as possible while the match is happening and the basketball players group try to basket. In this way the group will find its snatchy player and unknowingly in the middle of selection their practice will continue.”
I am too puzzled to decide if I want to be with Wayne or not and if I want then how.The feeling is all just keeping me down and I just listen to Loren gramble “Then what?”
“Then the basketball team uses those snatchy players in the match with boys to win the match.And the snatchy basketball players will get the chance to go to the American campus of St. Angela’s girls’ school to complete their high school.

Yes this is the thing.The opportunity to see Wayne more closely. He would be in front of me for a whole match. If we end up someday in the future together then I will tell my kids it was the first date of me with your father , different from usual I’ll say, it was a play date.I could be a player.If we win everyone would cheer for me. Then Wayne would look at me to see who the one I am to make him lose the challenge .Even though I haven't played this game in my life. I haven't even come to school to watch any basketball matches. I just know it’s a game.But it doesn’t matter.Loren said I just need to snatch the ball. I have to be fast just in that one responsibility and for only one day.

Not to mention I haven't even participated in any general sports event for the last two years for that one incident .I was in the 6th grade. All 6th graders were called to come on the ground and when they saw some of us weren't they just made them out of the class and locked the classroom door.And I was one of them who were sitting in the class. I came down and saw a lot of selection was happening at once.6 groups were running for the three legged race on the left side of the ground brick walkway.Our school ground is divided into six individual fields .And they used walkways to make those fields appear separated. Walking on these walkways. On the second one single jump rope, on the other relay race, the other-marvel and spoon race,the other -balloon pop,my upper lip upturned and chin went down as I saw Lin fell,dragging herself away from the other girl to save her balloon.

A knock on my shoulder I turned around and I saw a girl clenching the waist of her school dress. I couldn't see her face.Her upper body was bent and struck her hand to run me along her and before I could lift my leg strongly enough to run she pulled me and my front foot performed a bit more than barely to hold my position to run, losing my body. Guess who it was - Sally.I was meeting her for the first time but she made me race in their three legged race team.This time there were ten groups we were in the middle. Ms. Wang was standing at the border and she said that we have to run and touch her instead of a rope .It would be easy for her to find out who came first.I tried a lot to come out of Sally's hug grip but she just tied me with her without even taking my permission. Our pace wasn't matching .She stepped on my feet. I tried to step her and did .She glanced at me as if she knew. I was stiff. We were still running .We came close. We stepped on the end part of the piece of cloth Sally used to tie our legs. And I was about to catch Ms. Wang but I fell on my knees. It impacted others to fall over me.My knees were bleeding. After that I didn't try to be a sporty person

But today I got to go hard on me.For seizing the one day of me and Wayne.

***

Basketball girls, wearing red basketball suits, are resting on the blue chairs. So this is the area for players to sit.The other chairs are all black , these are for viewers.All of the players look like they have been running on the ground but the surprising thing is their faces are saying they could go and start over the run again.This is the spirit of a player.They are really strong.They are working hard for that match or they do it for every match.I wonder if the boys team doing this hard too. Jane is standing with the coach. Coach shows a clipboard to her,constantly talking, raising his eyebrows everytime she looks up to see Jane, crossing her hands, moving it side to side to relax the muscle.A lot of girls came for the selection. Who doesn't want to be part of it? It is like a gift package, you want it from your parents but they don't give it to you.

In my fascination I saw I would play with a basketball suit on. But looking at the crowd I don't think anyone would just order a ton of basketball suits for one day play. It isn't a problem. I can cope with it.

I take the crowd in front of a brown board stand in my view. I should go and check. I am standing 5 circles away from the board. I am not seeing anything but some numbers on it.I squint my eyes. I try to read *R oh the word is small it means it's roll, Group , the other column says group.*What group they are talking about.

A push from my side. My upper body leans to the floor half then I go up and see a girl making a shocking smile.I repeat making.

"Oh then you got interested in it, huh?" Loren asks.
"What are you doing here?" I ask
"Came to join."
"Do you want to play against your brother?"
"Then what?"
"Don't you have any sympathy for your brother?"
"I have to think first about myself. It's The USA." She says looking up high at the ceiling as if she could see America from here, slamming her hand in the air. "If I get selected then I could just have that American girl life.I could live alone . Do whatever I want. So much could happen."
"You really wanted to go to America this much?"
"I've always wanted to go somewhere else, away from the people here, somewhere - people don't know me."

"Everyone come here" The coach shouted, I look over but don't go near.I can hear her from here.
"Did you guys check the group list?" She asks
Oh the group list I couldn't check. I turned to it. I lift my index finger, frown my eyes to go through the list.
Loren pulls me from the back and says"You are with me"
I suddenly get fueled by not having to see the list and say "Oh great."

The coach said for today only 6th graders will be tested and the others could leave. But she didn't say it this way. She used the word "leftovers" and asked to live. Even though she said it to the whole crowd. But I felt the words in my skin. As if she indicated to me only. I am afraid of these things, getting insulted by people.That's why I always stay out of activities. Now I need to control my anxiety for 10 days so I could finally land on the basketball match day with the boy. I got some seconds to talk to, who's sister didn't want me to know their house address, yes that boy. I am doing all these for that boy.on the basketball match day. I wish I could show him what I am doing, how I am crossing my comfort zone to only see him close up to my face.I wish.

***

My mom hasn't come back yet from her school.I don't have academy today. It's very rare for me to get a day off in between work days like today. It's Monday.I am sitting on couch in front of my tv set with a bowl of french fries, for which I did request my grandma to give me money sneakily to not make my brother find it.For the french fries I missed my lunch to save enough space for those to go in. It's afternoon time. Only Me and granny are home. The lucky chance. It's time for

the show “*My Assistant”.* It’s a show where a girl from a small town just goes to a big city and finds a job of assisting a rude boss.But the boss’s family admires the girl.Usually, I watch the series with my granny unless I get a hint that the new episode is going to be spicy.Then the day I watch it alone.And today is the day.

Names of characters: Milan & Liza
[today episode 5]

Liza is staying over at Milan's house. Milan’s elder sister is getting married in 1 week. Liza needs to plan out every single detailed organization stuff and report it to Milan and Olivia (Milan’s sister). So Milan offered Liza to use his office room for work and rest.They are now sitting on the opposite side of each table.Both have computers open. Liza starts to read out the list of things and costs.From Liza’s side Milan’s eyes are showing then the rest of the lower parts get covered with his laptop. He just straightly looked at her.
The song starts to play:
What would you like to get, to meet me
for the first time again
Or,
What I need to pay, to see those eyes
for the first time again……..

The eye scene , the staring while she is not looking,the admiring scene reversing my mind to the time Wayne just looked back while about to crash his bicycle to a truck’s dump box.

The first day of Olivia’s wedding celebration“Family Dinner Night”. Two families from the groom and bride side came to the firm house rented for three days. The plan is they have to make and arrange their own dinner for this special night. And there will be no outsider.

But Liza is there.

On the dinner table Liza is sitting beside Milan.
That means the family has no problem with it. Quite good.
Then I see my version of Milan.
MY
Wayne, Wayne is there. He takes a bite of beef nods two times then eyeing at my plate looks up at me. Then says “Try it”
I wave at him and seek the bowl of thick spicy noodles.
He serves me.
I mouth“Thank you”
He looks up at me then at his plate and shares the half piece of beef with me.
I whisper “Is it really that bad?”
He points his fork at my plate and says “ Just eat.”
I take a bite and show a thumbs up, keeping it on my thigh.

The doorbell rings.I throw my hands jump on the couch hearing the bell. It must be Finn.Some french fries are on the floor.*Pick it up,quick,...quick.*I look for a place to hide it.Then shove some while running to my room to keep it there. I came out of the room.I couldn't finish swallowing it yet. I drink water. *oh …..it's still open, I almost forgot. Remote… remote. Yeah .* I put that off.
I open the door.And it is Finn.

Finn is my brother. He is two years older than me. There is nothing special about him to describe.But guess what? He is so dumb that he is attending the same grade as me.

***

Today 7th graders took the basketball test. I got to know from Loren that yesterday after making every other student out of the court, the coach just shut the door so that no one could know what's happening inside. And the 6th graders also didn't say anything about their performance.Now we don't have any idea what would happen to us. The other noticing thing was Rosie and Sally both were absent today. I went through a lot of possibilities then at the end I asked Loren if they were also participating in the basketball test. As far as I knew Sally could participate in it,because of her competitive nature. But then I remembered how Sally could compete against her boyfriend. So I just put those thoughts off. During our lunch time I couldn't stop staring at their empty benches. And I took Loren with me to check the group list.

And a hit,we all are in the same group. Me, Loren, Sally, Rosie. No matter how hard we try to come out from each other's life silently, our paths just bump into each other again and again.

***

All day I was thinking about them, about how they had reacted after noticing me, an unexpected person on that list.I couldn't bear to raise the restlessness in me. So I decided to call them. I have spent 1 hour on designing our conversation so that it doesn't look awkward to them. I have locked my room. Now I just need to act well.

First, I am going to call Rosie. I am holding the conversation note in front of me.
Conversation with Rosie:
Me: Hello?
Her mom: Hello
Me: Auntie, It's me Suzy. Can I talk to Rosie?
Her mom: O How are you Suzy?
……..
Rosie: Hello?
Me: O Rosie why didn't you come today?
Rosie: Actually this……this…..this and this.
And my action time
Me: O I see, I wanted to talk with you about the basketball test. We are on the same team.
And i f she asks about my joining. I will just say the same reason. The USA.

I dial her number. Her mom speaks. I continue to talk to her according to the script.But then she says “Rosie went to see Sally.” *What, why…..are they really getting close?* I scan my room, suck my lips to find out what to say *should I ask her why, then what will she think of us that we don’t talk to each other, then what if she tell my mom about it, and if my mom get to know then she is going to invite both of them to make the connection spark again, then both of them will think my mom is forcing them to be friends with me……I don’t want them to think in this way…. I shouldn’t.*

“Yeah, yeah I called her for that. Has she already left?” I say in high pitch.
She replied and we both hung up.I didn’t lose any more seconds I called Sally. I am not holding any notes now.

I call Sally.
Beep….beep…..beep . The dial goes off.
My mom says if someone doesn’t pick their call at once then that means either they are busy or don't want to talk to you.

I twist my hair with my index finger. My eyes are on the notes, I have prepared for them. The words on it got blurry in my view. I am not reading it, I am seeing something else. Making sense of the situation when I felt left out with them.

Once we 3 were heading to the ground during lunch break. Me and Rosie were talking. But suddenly, Sally with the back of 4 fingers of her right hand pushed me to go to the side. I looked at her hand then at her and her head was turned towards Rosie, whispering , not even considering my reaction to the push.

Then the other time, I think that was the time when Sally already started dating Jack and we didn't know or maybe only I was the one who didn't know. We were walking out in the corridor and I was sharing something with them and as always I was at the front so that I could make sure they were listening to me. Then when I turned I saw two girls, one of them was Sally’s boyfriend’s sister, saying something to them and all of them lowered their body to prevent anyone from hearing them. At that time I felt like the person who craves attention but doesn’t get at all.Then I walked as fast as I could to get out of their sight.

I let out a heavy sigh. Now I am not feeling any restlessness. As if I got relieved of something. Something that I was doubting, but today I got the proof to clear the doubt.I literally want to complain about everything to someone, someone who would also hate them. But I could only say it all to myself.

We were never friends.

And now if I get to choose the people I want to keep around me. Then at the very first I will make their name cross out of the list.

Chapter 4

3 times poke…Hey
2 times poke …hey

I am not going to get up. How many times you call mw. I am not going. I am not letting you win this time.

Every morning when my mom comes to wake me up. She just pokes me. And everytime she does, it feels so annoying. It feels like you are fighting with someone and they just attack you again and again without missing a chance and you can't attack back.You need to calm down cause if you attack back you will lose.Not because it's the rule of the game. But because it's your mom.You can't fight with her. You just need to stay shut up.

I have told her 100s of times. But she does that because she thinks it's the only way she could wake me up.

Now she is gone.I can wake up. If I wake up before she comes back again then It will be her defeat.

I see myself in the mirror. My face is oily, not too much. I grab my brush. I brush my teeth as I start thinking of what happened last night.

I need to do it fast. Today is the day of selection.I have messaged Loren to come to school early today.I can't make her wait.

I brush fiercely.

I dressed up. Bag is on my back. I am bouncing my left leg on my toes. This way gives me satisfaction that I am doing it fast.But actually I am swallowing as fast as I could. After every swallow I feel that the food got stuck in my food pipe. As if something bigger entered into it.
I ignore it.

Why is he being so late? I am standing on our door mat outside the door. Waiting for my Dad.
Papa, are you done, I am going to be late. It really takes me a lot of courage to say this. My dad is a person who can't do anything out of his routine. If he notices any varies then he becomes angry, like he could just stop you and make you sit back home, canceling school. I hope nothing happens like that.Today I need to be there.

Every step towards the school gets me excited. I sense my cheeks get spread to smile but my lip is holding itself tight. My teeth chatter as I breathe.

***

I see Loren sitting on her bench.She really listened to me.I walk to her, shove my backpack on my bench.

I move her to face me and say “Now listen to me carefully.”

There are only 10 girls in the class. We all have a distance that I am pretty sure they can’t listen to me.

Loren straightened her back, Looking a bit down at me, as I am leaning to her keeping my elbows one on my table and the other on my back table.

“I want to leave Rosie and Sally. And I want your help to do it.”

She is giving an expression that says She is not being able to make any sense of what I am doing.

“I know it sounds disturbing and awkward. But I know what I am doing?”

I take my bag on my lap sliding it down to keep the zip in front of my chest. Open it. I bring out a blue file, hand it to her.

She frowns at the file.

I gesture to her to read it.

She opens the file.

SITUATIONAL FRIENDSHIP CONTRACT
Expiration: Until you want [not before graduating high school]

Dear Loren, I am happy to inform you that I have chosen you to be my friend, after some time best friend.For some unwanted situation with Rosie and Sally I want to leave wearing a fake mask as a friend of theirs.I felt empty and looked for someone to share all these things but I didn’t have anyone.I want to have you now.

I am doing it for the following reasons:

1. I have been friends with Rosie for 7 years but she still finds Sally more fun.
2. Sally first met me, then she met Rosie but she prefers Rosie over me.
3. I haven’t had any friend like experiences with them as I had with you.

4. When I talk to them,I feel only excited .But When I talk to you, you also get excited [yes you would doubt me for that, but it's real I just didn't show it.]

Rule:

Until the expiration date you will be only my friend.

Let's get back to the

PLAN: We need to disqualify Rosie and Sally. So that only we could go to The USA .

Signature

I am clipping my nails with my teeth, looking at her expression to turn, but it stays the same.Ofcourse, Who would believe in this kind of nonsense.I have used my dad's printer machine for this. *What would happen now?* You are so dumb. What you would have done if you were at Loren's place.You would have laughed at it. And shared that with your mom. *It's Loren.* Yes, You should have found it earlier. She is Loren. A step, no, A staircase forward then you.She would just print a lot of copies and share it to the school.

As the thought goes through my mind,I snatch the file from her with my both hands.For some seconds my heart pounds

"What? Don't you want me to sign it?" She still has that face on.
"No need.You can just say it."

She lifts her both arms and jumps on me, and says "Why are you so cute Suzy? How could I say no to you? Yes. I want to be your friend."
She pauses.
She again says,"I thought we were already friends. But this way……., I am not leaving you"

I try to come out from her hug.

"Why are you being so clingy?" I say
"That's what friends do." She clicks her tongue. 'I know it's your first time. It's okay."

***

I am glad I am opposing Jane but wearing her basketball attire.All the official players sharing their attire with the candidates for playing freely.

Loren is charged to stand in front of the captain at the start of the game.Snatchy groups girls are all in an incomplete sumo squat pose.Eyes are all on coach.The whole situation gets my muscles tensed, as if It's being longer than natural.

And she whistles. The ball is in the air.Loren and Jane both jump.For this, an idea just hit me, we should have measured their hand's length as well as fingers. We can't leave behind the strong foot push to think, it also has an effect on jumping higher than the one having long hands and fingers.

My lips are shaped in a ring. My head starts to feel light as I raise my eyebrow looking up, still in my half sumo squat.

Jane taps the ball. Ada gets that, bounce, bounce, She passes by Sally.Sally spreads her hand to reach the ball, Ada just bounces the ball sideways to send it away from Sally's reach. Everyone is focusing and centering her. I have 2 people between her and me.Loren gets the ball

while Ada was about to basket.Loren passes me the ball. We get two snatched. I grip that turn to bounce my face bump into Jane's shoulder.I wonder if she didn't even move. I side pass her, dribble the ball through Jane's legs. No wonder, Glary bounces it, going by Jane's other side. I move towards her, Jane stopping with her both hands on. Loren snatches, Glarry tries to stop her with her leg placed in between. Ada has the ball standing close to the basket, jumps,Rosie pushes it, Loren grabs bounce, bounce, bounce, Jane gets one bounce Loren snatches, makes a pass to me. 3 opponents closing me.I side push the ball grab it with the other, turning to the front to ignore fall. Jane taps it, bouncing it as she avoids Sally's hand then backing Loren and basket.

I fall on my knees, releasing a long sigh. It is happening after a while. My legs trembled as I was in the middle of fall on my toes. I can't have them to know how terrible I am at physical things.

They cheered each other on and the game resumed.

Throughout the whole match I rolled my head looking up , straightened my back, threw my hands as if it was a javelin and needed to throw as far as I could to relax the muscles. Jane's t-shirt really absorbed my sweat now .I need to wash then could give it back.I asked her about it and she said it's her fourth one she let it go with the candidate.

These days I was so detached with my family that I couldn't tell them I was applying for the play and The USA sponsor. So I was yelling at me as I went to sleep without completing my study hour and had to tell it with tears in my eyes. She became so emotional she thought I was crying because she scolded me, but the pain came from the ache in my body.

How would I be able to handle the upcoming days with this low strength?

***

In some situations you are aware of filling your lungs with deep breaths, but you still try to fill in with mini ones.Like you are afraid of getting deep breaths. I couldn't find out the reason for that. A part of me is just ignoring the results considering the pain of physical games. Then a part of me longing to be on the list.

I have sent Loren to check the list. She tried to take me with her. But seeing the marks on my hand just made her stop. Yes I am so desperate that I unconsciously started peeling my thumbs skin off, redness spreading all over the peeled part.

I just shifted to crack my knuckles. It's been 15 minutes since she's gone. I hope our future stays safe. I am looking over at Sally's and Rosie's space. They are not at their spot. *Should I go and check it myself?* I can't hold it back anymore.

I stepped out of my bench then I saw Rosie and Sally through the window,walking to the classroom. I get out the back door, walk to the other side of the corridor.

I am not going in. I can just wait for Loren.
Why is it taking her so long? Is anyone even inside?
I feel like only I am here.

A sudden urge of being followed just chased me and I ran screaming a little.

“Hey Suzy”
A familiar voice I turn
“Congratulations! You are selected.” Jane says.

A burst of reaction pricked through my entire body. I jumped, ran towards her and hugged her. Clearly uncertain of the reason, the news, Jane or my buffed up emotion.I was having the reminders of how I wanted to join the team because I didn’t want Wayne to crush over her, and the same girl gave me the news, I hugged the same girl.

***

I came back to the class after the bell rings and followed Ms. Nora to the class to not have Rosie and Sally talk to me.

Loren gasps at me from her seat. Her looks appear to me as if she lost something and now she found that.

Loren frowns at me, bites her lower lip. A silence.

“Where did you go? I came back to the classroom and saw you weren’t at your place.Like you, Suzy was not at her place.”

I give Loren a smile, like I knew before knowing the news of getting selected.

A pause.

She walks her elbows to come to my side and drops her neck a little bit to hide herself as Ms. Nora ‘s lecture was going on and says, “We got selected” .She waves her arm in front of her collarbone, clenching her hand.

My smile is still on with growing excitement.

We drop our eyes to the book as I open my desk drawer to take my textbook out. Then I see an envelope, the similar one, Sr. Grace sent to Jane and I delivered that to her house the other day.

“Zara came to give this to you.” Loren whispers.

I smile, pursing my lips wondering if Wayne has sent it.I flip to lift the flap.Then I see Jane's name on it. From Sr. Grace.

"You were right, our school might be going through difficulties." I say, observing the flap teared part and taped on it.

***

Loren has just sent me a blog link, including a list of groups for teenager travelers to The USA . It's our third blog and list. We are trying to find a comfortable and nice group of people from another part of the world for us. Loren said in this way we could already make a message for the universe to take us to that place. Before starting to scroll down we have written down what kind of people we want around us. Now we are judging the group on the basis of our requirements.

A notification pops on my mobile screen. I click that and it leads to my chats with Loren. Loren sent a screenshot of a group chat,discussing how an anonymous girl could have kissed the boy .It is some kind of secretly bullying. I don't appreciate that .Instead it's giving me chills to imagine myself in that girl's place.

I message her back "cancel it."

She sends me different kinds of laughing, smiling and one eyebrow sticking up emojis.

She filled my gallery with these kinds of group chat screenshots. Some groups were too strict, some too sporty, some too musical, some too into boys.Then only one link remains. The group's title is "Step to the Future". The selection of words clearly indicates that It also wouldn't be a group I desire to have. But I hope it will prove me wrong.

I clicked the link. It opens up a chatting folder with the bright colors of sunset in summer. The starry sky in that folder carries a mixture of yellow, orange, violet and dark blue clouds. The chats are still loading giving some more moments of admiring the wallpaper.

All updates come out one by one.The most recent one was done by this evening. A picture with the text, *Today we have spent our bake day at Lin's house.* In the picture, the top of the wooden table is covered with flour, circle, flower, star and love shaped cookie cutters are lying on it,hands with bracelets and black tie on wrists are rubbing on the floury table.

I scroll up to see more from this group and find a digital planner more like a collage. Up to 19th of this month each date box has something stuck on it. Today was the 15th and a wireless headphone is on the 16th box with *Nina's house* written with blue ink, shopping bags sticker on 17th, Waves on 18th, books on 19th.And all the members from this group are girls.

This looks like fun and full of fun.I send it to Loren. I go back to see more from that group . Then Loren sends an okay signing smiley emoji.

Chapter 5

The next week I really didn't get any chance to think about anything else. It just went rapidly. I came to school, after school I went to practice, then the academy, then went home resting, then completed study hours after dinner, then slept..And somehow I liked it to just stay disconnected from the world and other out of your life and connection.

In between the days one evening Sally's mom called after hearing my selection. Actually her mother and my mother are from the same town. So that's why they try to build up a strong connection between the families starting from me and Sally. They tried to push their husbands to start a conversation in hope of getting them to bump into each other and make talks, but it didn't work. And then something they had common again was girls. Me and Sally. So they tried to group us but before that we had already met and had to meet each other for the first time in their presence on my parents 18th marriage anniversary.

After their call. I asked my mom about their conversation. But she didn't make a sound out of her mouth. I felt embarrassed as I remembered my mom's speech on having privacy in the family. So I just walked backwards from the door of the kitchen, following if something blew out of her before I went out of her view.

After getting Loren into the team Jane tried to ask her about the boys' team's progress. But she said she didn't even get to see after the match was decided.Now this means either they are preparing for it with their full energy and focus or they have already predicted that there would be a point where the other team will try to sneak on them that's why they are being out of sight to just create suspense. Like Lio is being outside of Loren's reach even after staying under one roof.

We have 12 hours left to play the match. The reason I came into this game as a proxy for only having to see Wayne. But the way my body worked for me to get trained for this one day has somehow ignited the fire to win the match, as it will be my first and last official basketball match. The fire has become more stronger after getting my own named basketball player attire.The fire wouldn't have been formed with just and reading quotes.

Loren said today she will listen to an inspiring and motivating playlist until she gets tired and falls asleep.But I wanted to rewatch some of the episodes of my childhood favorite serieses on youtube as I am promising myself to not watch those ever again. The last time I promised it I needed to watch it just by switching my profile to make sure I am not watching but someone else is, as if the youtube server was going to punish me if he gets to know I was watching the shows even after promising not to. Whenever I need to do something big like social interaction like family visit, house party, wedding etc then I just watch these shows to calm my anxiety until I leave the house, and in that time I watch those episodes, as if I will never come back and get to watch the episodes again.

Today I almost missed the time, the coach wanted us to hear her. I really got annoyed because of my mom's poke in the morning and slept for more than 30 minutes. But in the end my dream poked me and I couldn't act stubborn and woke up.

I can't eat well when I have exams to attend, result sheets to get and unexpectedly today. But my mom made my favorite Winnie the Pooh cake,containing 9 different faces of pooh.She kept the cake pan in the centre of the table and said I can eat as much as I want. I could feel my nervousness growing as I found my teeth chattering and body shivering. I couldn't just sit back straight. My upper body was just shifting from straight back to hunch down at repeat.

I swallowed without crushing the food in a perfect amount to make its way down easily and started coughing. After some time I couldn't bear it so I vomited that out secretly in my bathroom.

But it's not my first time. So I know I will be fine.

Basketball Match

Brothers group and Sisters group were sitting at each side of the court .They are the special guest in their own announced game.

As we walked into the court I was the last step into and my eyes were searching for that one person to take into my view. I get that moment he is in his yellow attire with his hands on his waist listening to his coach nodding along. I wonder what their coach needs to say in this kind of silly playful match.

This match could be a thing for the girls because of the offer but why they are looking more into it than us. Maybe their school is also up to something.

The coach all of us over her. We are standing in a round. She is looking behind me if anyone is left. But she didn't make any eye contact with me. I am standing at her very left. She looks at me and says nothing. I smile at her like a kid looking for praise.

In our group we have Jane, Ada, Glary assessed for basket, and me and Loren will snatch.

There will always be better physical features than you that will bring your confidence down. That's what is happening to me now. *They are really tall.I couldn't even reach their hands how could I snatch it. I should just come out of it.*

The whistle is blown.

The ball is tossed.

It was obvious Lio would tap the ball and he did. Jake bounced it, getting that to the basket. I ran to snatch the ball, An unknown from their team trying to block me. I should push him.push him. Jake flies with the ball and throws. Hand comes under the ball taps and it drops.

Ada bounces it , moving left to right to go forward then dribbles it to cross the before person. Lio gets it from her. Loren snatched it, looking to pass it. I am still at the sides.

Loren passes the ball to Jane. Jane runs fiercely Jake spreads his hand to the ball but misses and about to fall. The other boy blocks her. But she makes her way to the basket, she jumps, slaps the ball, the sound defines her strength.

I freeze for some moment but Loren pulls me in to cheer Jane. I observed Wayne he wasn't even making moves to get the ball. *Is he shy? But he wanted this game.*

Glary has the ball we are all running. As I run I see that ruffled boy running but just looking at me I gaze towards him with stiffness. Then the ball directed the opposite way.I come over the other side

The ruffled guy again came to block me. He was just targeting me. At one point when I got the ball I just pushed him with my side but it affected me a little bit.Suddenly Wayne came into between us and the ruffle boy fell, got hurt and replaced by another one.

Lio passes the ball yelling at Wayne. I didn't see Wayne was behind me and I followed the ball it dropped on Wayne. He ran. I went along with him as fast as I could .Ada and Glory both were before him. So he lifts himself in the air and smacks the ball and I saw him snacking his hand through his teammates, holding them tight. I wanted him to win.

10 minutes are left to end the game. Everyone was chasing, I took smaller steps, chasing but still far behind them at the corner of the court.Our coach was swaying hands side to side looking at my direction.then lifting her hands up doing *who knows* gesture with her both hands.

I closed my eyes to open it wide,but couldn't and everything around me turned black.

It was so shocking to me to experience getting passed out for the first time. I was always so proud of being able to keep my body working even after only having coffee. But that day I didn't compromise more and fell down.

You know there are some days you get to spend with yourself with lots of free time and you just sleep so deeply that after waking up you can't even detect if it is night or day without looking at the time. I was feeling that after I found myself in bed. I was hugging a pillow and its front side

somehow formed into a human chest. Like a sculpture built of a human chest with clay, soft clay didn't dry yet.Then I wanted to hug that more and kept my head against it.
Someone was swaying my feet with my toes just like we do to an Infant to get their attention. I looked over and she was beaming at me. I was frowning at her controlled by the migrant pain.I wide open my eyes .It's Loren.I slightly lifted myself and sat, then she came hurriedly hopped on my bed laid using her left elbow as her stand.I stared at her and blinked in the way *start talking I am listening.*

She didn't say anything but raise eyebrow repeatedly with squinted eyes and a teasing smile.

The sleep made me so tired that I felt I can't even walk properly and would need to crawl around to go somewhere.Then I fell on my face

Loren pulls me back, " You are sleeping for a whole day now." I heard a strong humming coming out of her. "Get up now." She says.

I sat back.

"You don't believe it. A lot of things happened.And you missed all." She says.

As I was listening to her I rolled my eyes around me and the whole room was a mess. Two coffee mugs were laying on my study table with unwrapped cookies packets still cookies in it. Usually I have a chair in my room. But now there are 3 chairs.Clothes were unfolded on my large red wood drum ottoman.

Did I have a party with Loren last night or after the game to celebrate our winning? I don't remember anything.

"Hey! Where are you?" Loren says.

My mom comes in.

'You got up. I should get something for you." Mom says then leaves.

I shrugged " what's happening?"

Loren pulls back her head as if *what is up with you?*

Then Loren shakes her head in a curt and says, "I think you are in the middle of sleep and reality.I am explaining. Do you remember you got senseless on the basketball court yesterday?"

My eyes widened and I processed that sometime ago when Loren mentioned that I had been sleeping for a day. It was not a joke.

“You got faint at the exact time, game ended. So everyone ran to you and took you to the school doctor and she said you need to rest. So your parents didn’t try to wake you up.” Loren says.
“Didn’t the school doctor mention about not having enough food or something like that?” I ask.
“She did but your parents said that you did have breakfast.” She pauses and says, “So you fainted because of that.”

I wash my face, come out from my room to walk around the house. And a wind bump on my face goes through the back of my neck. And I realize the wind is drying my sweat. He is sitting on my brother’s bed. *How could he be here?* He is looking down as my brother is playing games on his phone.I swish back and sigh deeply.

He is Wayne.

“What is the boy doing here?”
“You don’t know? I overheard your father and his father are colleagues.”
“ What?”

It feels like I was asleep for a long time and woke up in a whole fortunate new world.*But now what is he doing here?* I heard a couple of people laughing .I looked at the living room. Slightly walk to skip my brother’s room and peek on the leaving room. A man with grey white hair and a woman in jeans and floral printed top and Zara is sitting between them. So that means their whole family came. It might be just a few hours-visit. I need to lock myself up.I have been looking for reasons to meet him again. For that reason I played a basketball game. And now I have a bucket of reasons lingering before me and I just want to stay in my room. *Yes, it's me Suzy Cruize.*

I can’t handle this sudden wish-coming-true moment.

Loren says, “What happened ? Are you scared of something?”.

I almost forgot that Loren is here.

I take her hand straight, walk to my room and shut the door.

Loren is sitting in one of the chairs. I stand before her looking down at her.

“Look Loren, I don't understand what’s going on? Can you just tell what happened from yesterday to today and don’t skip anything. Okay. Let;s do it this way. Just say what you already didn’t. Think about it.”

She is giving me the look like *I want to run from here.*

“I think I didn’t inform you that we won the match. And our plans abroad are confirmed. I got the email today.”

Nothing about Wayne.

“And this “ Loren holding her phone up to my face showing a picture. A picture of me.Me and. Wayne.

My eyes are closed, hands hanging.Wayne is holding my back with his left hand and pulling my left hand with his right hand.

The post is made by miracle _15. I haven’t heard this name ever. Maybe it isn’t even a name.

I don’t know what Loren is thinking. Does she know about my feelings for Wayne? I look over at her but she is gazing back at me. A long silence between us. Don’t know what to say or how to react. Take it as a regular incident and ignore it or try to find out what Wayne has felt that time holding me.

As far as I remember I was at the corner of the court trying to move while everyone was at the other side of the court. Then how did he catch me in his arms? Did he just run from that side to hold me?

I have been longing for these things to happen to me. Now when It’s happening I am feeling terrified as if everyone caught me being into him silently and to punish me they all have come up with the idea to give me all things that I was wishing would happen. So that I back off on my own.

Everything seems too perfect. My family and his family are meeting, talking. My brother who hasn't ever got a friend to the house now he is sitting, playing games with that one person, Wayne.

That day I didn’t come out until they all left. I was glad that they didn’t want to see me.

I thought the post of me and Wayne might have been known by all. But going back to school didn’t feel like that. That means people are only interested in stuff when they believe something could happen between the boy and the girl.And I am clearly rejected from their list of girls that would look good with Wayne. That’s why no one bothered to doubt us.

Chapter 6

Me and Loren have officially emailed the group “step to the future” about our coming and desire to join their group. So they allowed us to access early in their group online.Now we could suggest any more different girl activities we have in our mind through the message. In that group we have talked to Beth, Ana,Ruby and Lily. They are 5 in total in the group. We had a video call with them. They shared their stories of growing up and the group’s history. So we could have a good time in The USA.

My birthday had already gone before we got the news of winning. But Loren has planned a nature themed birthday. It will be her last birthday here before going to The USA. So she wanted to spend it with lots of memories. She decided to invite the basketball players and me. At first I thought it would take place in her house with nature decoration props. But she said her grandparents asked her to come to their place and celebrate the birthday with them. As for the upcoming circumstances. So she will take us to the countryside to her grandparents house. We will stay there for three nights, like full weekend.Her birthday happens to be on Sunday.

After the change of plan Loren said “see this is the power of manifestation I wanted to celebrate it and now The Universe has already setted up things for me.”

But It wasn’t easy for me to ask my parents if I could go with them. Then I requested Loren to come over and invite me in front of her . But she was a step ahead of me. She came with her mom. I was impressed by that. It showed that she really wanted me to participate in her birthday celebration.

Her mom was one of the people who could talk organizationally. Like the one who would just melt you with their curiosity in you and you just pour out all your talks you didn’t want to share.And my mom permitted me to go.

It is going to be my first ever trip with friends, a group of people I know before my family. My family used to tease me that I don’t have people other than them . I didn’t have people who would come to my family and introduce themselves as I am Suzy’s this or that.I didn't have people who would want me so desperately to be a part of their happiness But now I have.I am with them.And I am happy.I am not feeling left out.

We left at 6pm after completing the school day. Loren's parents are driving us to her grandparents house. The location is in the mountains of kaohsiung.Usually I sleep on the road to anywhere far .But for this one I tried to catch as many sights as possible. I was listening to my playlist.

We needed to get out of the car a bit earlier than our destination. Loren's both grandparents came to receive us. She introduced us one by one to them. We went down to the main road to the mountain, then climbed the mountain for 15 minutes.

Out of all of us I was the only one, helplessly panting.Then Mr.Li came to lift my bag and I tried to take that back from him. But he waved me not to.

It was so embarrassing that I wanted to help him out while we stayed to pay my respect for him.

When we crossed their boundary, we all left our bags at the entrance and roamed around to see the house.The trees on each side of the roads formationed in a zigzag pattern.

An black wooden house, woods are white inside the house. A waterless discoloured creme fountain at the front open space. Two 1 and half inch giant, ground attached, aged vase at the sides of the door to their house. Two metal chairs with one fire pan at the centre on some steps beyond the edge of the ground goes down. Yellow kitchen door at the corner side of the house. A roof with metal and wooden railing on the second floor. The inside of the house is decorated in boho style.

That night we didn't stay up until night and we went to sleep. They had four rooms so one room we five shared . Then one room was for Loren's brother's. Her parents and her grandparents were in the other two rooms.

I was starving and couldn't sleep more and wake up. I crept to the dorr to see if anyone woke up. But there was no one. So crept again to the bed and tried to wake Loren up. After some of my gentle tries I got frustrated and poked her.

***

Now we are making our breakfast. Her parents had bought 4-5 packs of frozen dumplings and egg cake skin, mayonnaise and chili sauce.For the egg skin we agreed to add corn.While we were making breakfast everyone started to come out of the room and helped out.

I was placing the washed plates on the table as I saw Lio.

He said," Hey"

I nodded with a smile .

I have totally forgotten that Lio's birthday is also on the same day. I thought only we girls would be here.

I headed back to the kitchen to help myself with the food. My full focus was on my plate as I was finally getting to eat. As I grab my chair, I pull to sit . The chair beside me also gets a pull and we both sit beside each other. It's again Wayne.

I didn’t get to experience the moment I fell in his arms. But now I am fully aware that we are closely sitting on the 4 chair table having breakfast.

I smiled slightly and It didn’t fade. Loren noticed that and asked “ Why are you smiling?”

“Actually, it’s my first time staying away from home, family, enjoying with people, whom only I know. But they don’t.” It feels like I got a secret hut of people to make memories only I 'll be in it.Only I could tell the stories of this trip in the family gatherings and all will listen to me. Some stories I also will have to share.

“Then you should go out more.” Says Wayne. The voice again got into my ears after so long.

I nodded to him.I didn’t find any other way to respond.

But why did he say I should . Did he want me to go out so that he could bump into me or did he just say it as a friend? Does he consider me as a friend? I don’t know what has provoked him to advise me. But I am open to listen, all the advice he wants to give.

But the words were his last words.

After we finished our breakfast, Mr.Li asked us to go to the food market to buy our desired items for lunch and dinner today.I thought at this, he would take all the kids. But he planned something else for the boys. He asked the boys to help Loren’s parents to collect wood and set fire as we all wanted to cook outside for the days we would be here.

Loren’s both grandparents came with us. Jane brought a polaroid camera to click some pictures of the mountains. To enjoy the mountain around us all of us wanted to go through the jungle instead of the built road.

The crushing sound stayed along the way we walked to the store. And we were looking down while walking all the way here. We saw some shameplants on the way , and Jane clicked some polaroid pictures as we played with them. We were 5 girls and I think we all just made those plants sleep, those came to our view. We stayed in that place until we all made sure that no shameplant was left. It was fun.

At the store we bought shrimp, beef, beef sausage for lunch and dinner, for sweets we bought mango, strawberry, orange and tangerine.And for snacks we bought some cookies and cakes with chocolate and rainbow sprinkle topping.

The fire pan has been dragged to the centre of the ground, Pieces of square wood were laying with the kerb.They are still trying to make the fire. Lio was trying to blow while sitting down with his tes sticking out.And Jake with Wayne was admiring him from the side.I was seeing all these things happening from the glass door beside the dinner table.

We were picking out the things we got for today on the dinner table.Loren's mom was figuring out what set of plates we should use,as her mother in law telling the stories of those plates' journey to their house and about the days those were used at.Ada was helping Loren's mom to clean the plates she decide to use.And Glary with Jane was selecting and spreading the polaroid picture to take some clicks in her mobile for instagram.

Everyone was so happy.

Loren's dad did cooking for that day. He made creamy garlic shrimp, pork with potato curry and beef sausages. We ate that with rice. We ate outside sitting on the ground with the breeze swishing our hair. It felt free.

***

I came up to the 2nd floor with Loren for a quiet moment. The mountains are before us. Remember the mangoes . We made juice from it. We added some sugar to feel the sweetness of the view. The sky was full with white clouds. It looked like I could jump and catch them.

"So are you nervous or happy?" Loren asked

" I am happy. I feel if someone punishes me for staying here with all the facilities then I won't ignore it.All these things feel like I am on a vacation.And ...."

"Suzy, I am asking about The USA."

"Oh"

I didn't even realize that I am now leaving in the present with full focus. I am just thinking about the present that I just answered Loren with keeping this mountains' view in my mind. That's what nature does to you; they just pull you in and wash away all your worries with its brightness.

I side eyed her, she is still looking at me.

"Actually I am really enjoying my time hear.That's why I didn't listen to you clearly.Sorry." I replied.

"I thought the mango just made you druk" She says .Then we both laugh.

My eyes went off her and landed on the ground.I saw Wayne walking up the ground and got in the house. His shirt was crumpled at the left side of the neck, just like someone would twist it with hand.But the door shutted twice. So I moved my back to straight to check if he was going out again after getting in. He didn't.

That means two people went inside.Did two of three of them had a fight.

I should go and see as if I could just jump into them to stop them fighting. But I wanted to see what happened as long as It was Wayne.

I came down but there wasn't anyone.

***

Only 20 minutes were left until 12. 10 minutes ago Loren's mom asked me to keep Loren busy till it's 12. I had been in the washroom to plan the things to talk about. After coming back I tried to observe her while pretending to scroll on my phone, sitting at the edge of her bed. 10 minutes had passed but Loren was just lying and leaning her head against the headboard slat, no moving at all.

So I just let that happen. It would be safe to just stay out of the action until she made any action.

Tick, tick,tick

Only 15 minutes then . The way she was just ignoring every possible situation, It does look like she was just pretending not knowing anything would happen to her at the midnight of her birthday.I should just limit myself to only suspect her.

She yawned and kept the mobile aside, got down the bed,started walking, crossed me. I wanted to stop her with my hand but a fast head shaking toddlers' toy was abruptly installed in my hand that it tried but didn't reach Loren to stop . So Something just spilled from my mouth that I shouldn't have.

She walked backwards, came beside me and was sitting beside me as if she was numb.

"What did you say?" Loren asks with her motionless eyes and expressionless face.

I look up at her, pursing my lips.

"Did you just say you like someone?" As she asked, her o shaped lips turned to a wide smile.

The door clicks open. Glary came in.

"Your mom is calling you," Glary said, gesturing to Loren and putting her right hand to the doorknob.

"Coming." Loren said, frowning her eyebrows, lifting her cheeks in an annoyed way and waved to Glary.

Glary linked her lower lip and was searching for something on the floor. As we got to experience the heart's reaction to sudden thunder of Loren's mom's.
She called out for Loren from somewhere, and it followed Glary .

Loren just got up and went out . I walked after her. We saw Lio take one step to the hallway but before his second step fell on the hallway, it got blacked out.

We all were freezed at that moment.

Everything was glowing again with the chorus of *the birthday song.*

Me, Glary and Jake we stood at the hallway and let Lio and Loren go first.Thier faces were beaming at the view. We continued the birthday song. Mr Li used fanning with a bare hand gesture to call Lio and Loren close and cut the cake.

They cutted the cake standing at the two opposite sides of their parents and grandparents. Then we clicked some photos after giving a bite of their birthday cake to everyone. Loren came to me and just with no sign put the creme on my nose saying "You will be my long partner. So have a big bite." We both laughed.

We took the photos on Jane's polaroid camera.

We were standing around the table. Suddenly Mr.Li rushed and hyped up to take a group photo and we couldn't get much time to think and became confused butterflies, looking for the best flowers to sit on. Mr.Li pulled me and Loren and pointed to Loren to stand in the middle of the group and told me to stand beside her.

I saw a hint of the color of the person behind me, Wayne. I tried to wear an invisible heel shoe out of excitement.I tilted my head a little bit to my right to listen to Wayne's heartbeat as we clicked the group photo.

***

There wouldn't be any birthday cake today, but we are dressing ourselves maybe for dinner, for a movie, or for games.

Loren is wearing a black mid length dress with its bishop sleeves. Glary is wearing white leaning square patterned red skirt with white plain knitted top.For Jane, a braided pattern red top with puffy sleeves.Ada chose to wear jeans shirt style mini dress with transparent black leggings. I wore a mini green yellow flower patterned cotton fabric notch collared, mid length dress.

I see Wayne and I stand at the hallway corner. He is sitting on the white cloudy couch at the right side of the hallway. So I am seeing him from behind

It is actually quite disappointing that the shirt he chose, telling me that either he didn't want to come out of the room or he didn't like to put thoughts on his dress.
The shirt colour is not preferable with the pattern.At Least I don't like it.

I think I need to shop for shirts for him in the future. I tilt my head at my ghostly clone as I get a plan to follow to build my future. It wouldn't be bad if I share it with my " step into the future" group.

The idea of shopping for your future boyfriend or husband or life. After we get our desired guy we can give the previously bought gift to them.

It would be an uncomfortable moment if I just sat around close to him and sent an idea related to him to a girl group. So I followed the way to the dinner table.
.
There wasn't anything special. We just sat and talked with each other and had dinner together. We played games on our own.Like UNO and LUDO.

***

I got to see Loren at her room climbing up on her blown up bed with gifts, after everyone just went to rest. She has a bunch of polaroid pictures before her. She is picking one and sticking it to the album Mr and Mrs. Li gave her.

I tiptoe to not disturb her with her moment . And sit beside the bed on my knees to shuffle through the photocards.I got into the view of her album scribbled with her written message with a blue pen.

Beneath her family picture she wrote *Epic*

Beneath her picture with Mr.and Mrs. Li, the words say *Epic than epic.*

On the photocard of 5 of us playing with shameplant she doodled cat ears on our head.

Then the photo of the group where me and Wayne standing together.The smile on his face.I could just see it as long as I want. The smile is still, no move. No bohering of anything or the stress of bothering to bother looking away. I could just borrow this one picture to Loren.

Then the tring , the sound you get from your neighbour, the one that raises your excitement with its volume,the one that makes you wonder *what could be happening there* and end the sentence with something *they must be enjoying.* The sound is music. But in this room the sound is Jane's phone's ringtone.

I ask Loren about Jane. She searches on her out of sight house map and says don't know.

It was her mom .The phone is still ringing and calling out her name.She didn't respond. I see the front space, living room. Then I was about to climb the stairs but I heard a noise from the backyard door. I stand by the door.

"Why are you doing this to me? I have only wanted to spend a little bit of time with me so that we could get to know each other."

"I don't want to know you" She says in a stiff voice.

"Just give me a chance," he says in a hopeful voice.

The phone in my hand lit up again before it could make any sound. I pushed the stop button clenching that in my hand.

Wayne and Jane.At the end it was them.

Chapter 7

A tiny group of emotion just got into my chest and flowed in my whole body; the fear of failing an exam, the embarrassment of getting scolded by the best teacher of the school in front of your whole class, the regret of not answering the easiest question in exam before time ran out.Wayne's words created a way for these emotions from nowhere to my body: the words wasn't even released for me.

I couldn't stand there anymore. I needed to go somewhere by myself. I went to the roof and looked at the sky. Even with those sprouts of emotions in my heart; I compared my situation with movie scenes and decided to respect reality and its existence by not mixing it up with any fantasy world.

And the trio of emotions couldn't come out through my eyes.

Me and Loren slept on the roof that night. At first we both were silent. But she jumped up and asked for her long awaited answer. *Who is the guy* I didn't want to make it more complicated; I answered her right away *He likes someone else.* Loren; an ambassador of "Quote for Life" made an appearance to me and said "If you want to stop obsessing or liking someone then just find a better person then the previous one."

I still repeat that to myself. The words were like reflecting my actions to me. I actually did applied the learning in my life before even learning it; I wanted to come out of the friendship with Sally and Rosie and I did by finding a better person than them; Loren

The next day I slept the whole way to my house.

We had final exams for the second semester before our last summer break in Taiwan for the next couple of years.A lot of things happened that summer. We got our passport renewed after the result. We got the acceptance letter from the school. We went to the visa embassy to get the visa . Our family planned a goodbye dinner at both houses; one each weekend. Our group liked my "shopping for future" suggestion for the fun time activity.They wanted us to join them in the upcoming activities online to make us feel one of them before we personally met.

In between all these Jane once invited me and Loren to her house for a casual dinner. I did try to avoid it. But Loren confirmed to me that she would not go if I don't. She said it's her first time going to her house and if she goes alone then it would be a bit awkward for her. And also if we both don't; it would be a bit neglected moment for Jane too.

We went to their house. We saw that they were packing their stuff up. It was easy to tell that they are going to shift from here. Jane invited us on busy days like that day to have dinner. The living room was congested with box stacks. So she took us to her room .There we found we were not alone. Some of the other girls from school also came.

The room is half empty; you could talk and hear it echo. Only her study table and bed were still there. There was a part attached to the window wall line; you could lean,keeping your elbow on it. In the middle of the part and the ground; she piled up books in two series, right beside her study table.Her bed was next to the study table.

The girls were talking sitting on the ground; against the bed's side rail. They were playing UNO.They were 4. Two of them were Ada and Glary and the other two were her cousins.I have seen them in our school.

fJane also came and sat with us. Loren asked her about their shifting. Then she said they are going back to Japan due to her father's transfer.

I looked up while opening my mouth in a half circle shape; I was taking a break from organizing my UNO cards. But the other girls except Loren were still doing their work for cards; as if they already knew.

I was neutral about this news.I was staring down pretending to listen to their conversation; unaware of expressing exactly what a person is supposed to in a situation like this.

A card just flew to the direction ; under the bed and Ad just jumped on her knees bent down to reach it. As she reached and moved her hand to come out she just hit the table and the stack of books fell.

We all just shouted *oh* with mid and high pitch mixed.

Ada sneakily smiled at us as we stared at her with pretentious shock.

Me and Loren crawled to the books to help Ada. We were keeping it in order of colors, sizes.

"Hey! Look" Loren says holding a piece of paper her eyes formed into doggy eyes.She started tapping my knees , I leaned towards slightly and within a second she shoved the paper into my face. I was blinking with my blurry vision,I grabbed it; Ada snatched and slammed it on the ground. I didn't read it until Ada followed the words with her finger.

Hi. It's actually not cool to send you this letter. But it is the only way I could reach you.I am glad that we met. I have joined basketball for you. You are really a serious player. I have just asked you to play with me . But I think you took it as a challenge from a boy. I hope you are understanding me. I know if we play you will perform better than us. But what should I say, I didn't mean it to make you feel down. If you got hurt by any of my words that day. Then I am sorry. I don't want my story to begin with you in this way.

I hope we meet often.

Wayne

The words, The talk, the sentence everything indicates a different personality; a personality only rises for Jane. I have always seen him with his stiff face. And in some rare moments if he smiled, it looked like he was making an effort.

The letter poured some water to the trio of emotion sprout; that had emerged in my chest by that night and couldn't grow. It started to grow and with every breath it screamed for more water ; my hands started to sweat, my throat dried, I coughed twice into my fist.I walked to the living room. Jane asked me if I am still coughing. I whispered " I am sick" as if I lost my voice. And she froze there. I went straight home. That was my last time meeting her. After 2 weeks our flight was scheduled.

***

Beth and Ruby came to welcome us. They are really promising people.They said, and they did come.They directed our way to the school and the dorm. These two were also in our class. But they stay in a shared apartment with the other two. They said they would have let us in that apartment if that was big enough for six people.

There were people in our country ; came to advise us on lots of things as we were going alone. But I think we have found the best guides and supportive people here. We wouldn't have to face any major trouble.

That day we didn't want to rest, we wanted to roam around to see life here.Beth and Ana were with us for the whole day.

We went to Burnham Park. It has a lake front view, open grassy area. We saw people riding bikes there. I have planned with Loren; we will come someday to ride bikes here, even though both of us don't know how to ride bikes.I t would be fun, like the silly girls in a movie. We ate donuts; Ana backed for us; sitting at the grass with the breezes.

They introduced us to some of their go-to snacks places near the school. They took us to a secret, silent place. I don't know exactly where it was. But after walking through a narrow road the went to the back side of the building we could see from the street and ends up at a circular shaped open space.At the one side of circular we were standing along the buildings and the other side of the circular shape a red bricked building were standing.On the ground floor of that building that was a cafeteria. The cafeteria is managed by a 60 year old couple; Beth's grandparents.It could be called as a family space.; as many people don't know about the location.. It's only known by people who know Beth's family.We had lunch there.

It was fun with them.

After 1 year we shifted with them. Ana and Lily were older than us. They went to New York for college.The 4 of them literally were cousins and we got to know after we shifted to their house and happened to be looking through their album. We were just shocked and Beth laughed

politely looking at us and said “you didn't know”. That means the group was their private group; but they let us join.

The shared apartment was a room apartment. And we had one bed, a dressing table, white mid-sized drawer white desk with a wooden chair.Walls were dark-light blue with framed posters hung on, the attached counter with the basin used to be in a chaotic scene with all our makeup products. Room’s door used to be slightly half closed because of the hand bags collection, and a kitchen with a white circular corner Freezer and instead of the dinner table we had a tea table with a couch set.We used to sleep in turns; If we slept on bed one day then the other day we slept on the ground with white fluffy mattress.

The next years of high school we went to the park after school, walked at the lake view path in the evening, had lunch in that secret cafe, baked, dresses up for no reason but to click pictures, listen to music, watched movies, talked about fantasy at the winter nights and most importantly shopped a lot of things for our future boyfriend, when the idea hit me I was thinking about Wayne, but I shopped for someone; i don’t know yet.But the words of Loren stayed always with me *find a better one.*

***

We will graduate in a month now. We had decided to have a last special moment with each other. We had planned that we would go to the lake side and spend a night in the camping van with music and talks.But yesterday my manager called to have me for the night shift as the previous employee fell into an emergency. He could have asked his sneaky-scoldy-game blinded brother to do a proper shift duty at his own restaurant. He always sits behind the counter, keeps an employee beside him; as his representative to handle the work; he is supposed to do; do you know how annoying it is to listen to his whispered curses; at the gaming character while talking to the customers in a sweet tone.However, my day was ruined and I couldn’t go with the group.

I am now heading back to the house. I have never stayed alone after coming to chicago. It was my first time; it would be okay for me as our plot owner Mrs.Otto lives next door.And our house is near my workplace. Honestly, my job is in the same neighbourhood as my house, that’s the reason I don’t want to lose it.

I am steppin to the direction of the stairs as the guard calls me and says, “A boy came looking for your flat number. I’ve said that you all are not here.But he had the keys so I let him go.”

I frowned my brows, pulled my lips inside my mouth as I was staring at the stairs and listening to him.

A guy. Out of all 4 of us, only Ruby has a boyfriend. And she brings him sometimes. Does that mean she also didn’t go? It would be a bit miserable if I go there now. What if they are doing

something very hard.It’s already midnight. Where should I go? I should alert her before I go. I crept along the stairs as I dialed Ruby’s number. She didn’t pick up.

I am standing before our house door, dialing. Hands on the doorknob.I keep my ear against the door.My hand on the doorknob gets its own nerve attached to a part of my mind that doesn’t even exist and twists the doorknob. I panicked, leaning against the door; it opened gently exposing a view of a room with golden lit light; a guy with his bare torso; looking at the other side. I rushed to close the door just like a kid trying to sneak out the room at midnight.The dialing goes off. Ruby picked up.

“Where would I go? And please do remember to change the bed sheet.” I throw up as she comes on the line; as if she was witnessing these all things with me.

“What are you talking about?” Ruby asks.

“You should have told me about your night” I whisper on the phone.

“What night?”

“Tonight, in our house, you are with your boyfriend.”

“What?”

A pause.

I am at the camping van now. She broke the pause; I wonder if she was collecting the energy of staying gentle from nature.

“Okay. I know you wanted to do it in secret but I'm standing outside the house. So you can share with me.”

“What would I share? I really came for the camp night.”

“What?”

I came down to the next floor.

A silence.

“I think there is something terrible happening right now. A guy is in our apartment without any shirt on.”

They all screamed at the same time on the phone; it led me to pull it to a safe distance and rub my ear.

They all just spitballed everything they could.I couldn’t think of myself to do any of those things they advised me to do. I could just wait on the street before they arrived the next morning.

You know those moments; you see and hear something and you sense that you have experienced that before but can’t exactly spot where. That happened to me while I was about to go down.

The guy was singing. And the voice was so perfect for the song; it would make you stay and listen to him singing.I was going to reach the doorknob to see the guy. It got flung open like he noticed he was being observed; his face was on me with his wet hair falling over his eyes and his naked torso. Those eyes again; after this all years but this time there wasn't anything between us.

Wayne. How could he come here? There isn’t any way for him to come here.And even if he came to this country. Why is he in our apartment? What led him here? Everything was so mysterious. Did he just become a member of a mafia gang after getting rejected from Jane.Did he run away from the country to hide? Did he steal our keys to just stay for one night? Or It is just me imagining his face on a criminal’s face. My eyes blinked first and I looked away.

Chapter 8

He leaves that door open and conducts his way to the inside in after-sleeping-walking style. It felt like it was his own house. No words came out his mouth.Standing on a doormat I scanned the whole room to find anything creepy. He is in the room now.

A black boot with thin white ribbon drawn in the messy tying way is on the right side of the first step from the door. A coffee mug is lying on the tea table on the right side.The towel he wiped himself is on the back of the sofa.A black cap is also on the tea table.

At the very moment Mrs' Otto came out of her house. She got me and asked about the camping. I cleared her confusion. She was going to the ground for a walk. Obviously she gave me a look saying *what* I shifted my eyes to my phone. Instantly a hand just came beside my left, grabbed my wrist and pulled me inside; the door closed.

What Mrs. Otto will think. Will she go and talk about what she saw just right now? Will she go and inform secretly.I am looking at the door waiting for her to come; there is a possibility she would. But she didn't.

He is now wearing a red cotton shirt;only one button was fastened when he pulled me. Now he is buttoning all of them, looking at me.

I looked away.My hands started to sweat.My thumb is trying to make its way to enter its fist hole.

He again strolls on to sit on one of the couches and says in his deep voice.“Thank you for the shirt.”

The shirt; I bought for my future boyfriend. I have collected button shirts with different colors and different patterns. And for this one. I went with Ana's grandmother as she took us to a shop established for over 50 years.I haven't given him that. And more than that I kept all those things in a bag.How could he find that? I wanted to ask but I didn't. I am still standing at the same place.

He takes a sip of the coffee.

I am lingering between is he really Wayne or my mind is playing with me.

“You can come and sit.“ He says looking at me tilting his head a little bit at me.

I don't move.

“I have some talk with you.It's not going to be easy so come and sit.” He says holding the mug right before his lips.

I don’t move.
“Okay. Your wish. So listen. “

A pause.

“I am going to be your boyfriend then husband.If you want we could start the relationship tomorrow.” He says. He didn’t even look back at me.

I realized my face got clenched at his words but I didn’t have the courage to say anything.

All of a sudden why does he want to be with me.What about Jane.I didn't even get a chance to speak about him to anyone.Maybe, he is just randomly saying these things because he doesn’t have anywhere to go and wants to use me.

I want to cry.The suffocation is rising. It feels like I would burst at any moment. It would be easier than taking any step to speak with him.I slam my left hand on the wall to stop me falling down. He gets up and brings water for mr. He tries to hold me. I squeeze me out of his reach.

He folded his arms as I turned my back at him.

“See I know It’s a sudden attack for you and….”

“Can you please leave?” I responded before he could finish his sentence.

Without any more word he left wearing the cap.Night time and cap. Everything is just odd.

***

I wasn’t even drunk.Yeah I was a bit sleepy. But a dream could force you to come and sleep while your eyes are still open, I have experienced that; the day Wayne came to our house. It was an ironic thing that I witnessed and dreamt. The next day I woke up, the coffee mug and the towel were there., but the uncomfortness of sensing two different worlds at the same time wasn’t there. The realization of reality cooled me down and came out in a form of ethical glow and filled the room with its actual people; Beth, Ruby and Loren.

I have tried to go to a professional to talk and consult about the situation; happened that night;to know exactly what that belongs to him is left with me to think again about him.The courage of trusting someone to sneak at your inside; wasn’t enough in me and every time I went I just turned over and came back.

The more I avoided going and having a session with a psychologist , the more my mind was shifting Wayne from the unconscious world to the conscious world. And I started to believe in my sickness on our graduation day; A bouquet bracing orange roses,yellow billy balls,pink and peach blossoms,white daisies and small blue flowers; wrapped with a shimmery net fabric and

mail paper with a card saying *Congratulations! From Wayne.* It poked in my cheek and I smirked.The message is so-like Wayne. My illness has become so bad that I am seeing non-existing things now. Even after knowing no one could see it I still put that card off the bouquet to at least comfort me that no one would see it as I saw Loren and Lily were coming toward me.Incas of the bouquet .I did receive.But who was its actual sender.I didn't know.

***

We all are now in different ways. Beth went to New York, Ruby in California.But me and Loren, we are taking a break, I know, I know what we have done that we need a break; actually it's not a break like break; It's a therapy for my illness. You are wondering if I have told Loren everything. Absolutely not.I needed to show her an unknown nomad's youtube videos to develop her interest to go with me and spend 2 weeks at a farm.

I have researched online that farms, spending your time in nature with animals could bring your mind's attention away from your undesired worries to your present life and give you the ability to start a new life with fresh feeling.

I had looked for farms in this order. For the first time, I ticked the farms with bright sunlights posts,in the next round I picked farms with less adventurous animals and then I found out about Sunfed Farm owned by Ms.Castle Cooper.

But she was really strict that she didn't let us touch her sheeps.Then what did we do? She had a youtube channel and she uploaded videos on a daily basis without editing anything out. And I had the job to capture every small tiny interesting thing that happened around there. Loren was in charge of lazy sheeps; she helped them to move the other parts of the ground and eat while explaining to them to be proud of having this much ground of food.

We came home 3 days ago and are now packing our bags again for visiting California. Do you remember Lily came on our graduation day? She came to invite us to her wedding. It is a 3 day wedding. We are leaving tomorrow.

Chapter 9

I was wearing pink jeans with white t-shirt and Lorendressed herself with a white formal pant and white collar line black t-shirt.

We had to find our way on our own here cause Loren wanted to give a surprise visit. I was against her but I couldn't argue with her. You know Loren. She would have just left me because she knows I wouldn't choose to roam around by myself. I am afraid of getting lost and I only go alone to places; I am familiar with.

The sky part of the gate leaves are oval shaped with black colored bored fences.We are standing right before it. We rang the bell.

Someone opens the door. Me and Loren both bend at our sides to see. We don't recognize it. We say we came for the wedding and we just start to say the names of the girls; the woman gets her step back and a girl comes out in her pajama pants and blue t-shirt. Loren screams *Hey* in the mid frequency.I grin at the girl and give a group hug.

We walked on the brick drawn narrow path to the two sets of 3 steps concrete stairs; as we followed Ruby.The walls of the house looks like they glued brick one on one to build it.The walls are the same from the inside and outside.They have a sitting area in their backyard made with bamboo. There is a mango tree at the opposite side and they have two swings hanging on it.They have already decorated the backyard with string lights and white benches and tables. They have this easy innovation where they could pull out the rails attached with the backyard wooden floors that separates the garden. They have pulled that out to make it a stage. And they have slid the glass doors that separates the living room to make it an open hall dancefloor.

We met the other three girls at Lily's room. They have given us the bridesmaids dresses for the wedding day.My one is a spaghetti strap ankle length lace fabric pink dress and Loren's one is a leg slit dress of silk fabric pink dress.

Loren went to stand before the floor mirror; they were placed just beside the window; you could see the front door from there.She pinned that dress over her to see how she looked and me and Ruby just admiring her and then suddenly…

"Oh…… Shoot. Hide, hide,hide." Loren said after she saw something through the window.She threw the dress on the bed looking for something making herself slightly bend towards the ground.

Me and Ruby gave each other a look then eyes again on Loren.

Loren grabbed both of us and pulled us while making her way in the middle of us.We got turned and were taken to the bathroom.

“What are you doing?” Ruby asked as we stepped into the bathroom.

“Don’t scream.Lily is here.” Loren whispered.

“Then?” I asked as we heard the door click.

Loren gave me a look with *what then?*

Then we all three pressed our ears on the door.

Lily came in and said something you would to stop someone to do something but in a shy tone. She is with her fiance; no doubt.We giggled.But Loren was hammering my shoulder to stop herself from bursting out. I needed to put her hand down. Then they kissed and It was making us uneasy so we planned to come out.It would be the best moment to pop out. We unlocked the door latch without making any noise and then we all shouted her name.

Lily instantly jumped out of the kiss and took a half whirl grip her fiance’s by his side.Then looked at us as we were laughing at our silliness.

Her down turned mouth started smiling and she just stared at us.Her fiance left the room.And Loren got up from the floor and hugged her. Then she reached for me and Ruby pulled us into the hug.

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By the evening a lot of people came.You would see the full house flooded with people. So Ruby just introduced her family and each guest to me by pointing at them as we were standing by the edge of the stairs.

Loren said as she found their parents in the middle of the flood. “The woman who is standing by the left corner of the table is my mom and the one who is standing beside her is Ana’s Mom.And after a chair gap the man sitting on the next chair is Lily’s father.And the man at the backyard with a cigarette is my dad. My mom and Ana’s mom are the 2nd and 3rd kids of my granddad.1st one is Lily’s mom and the last one is Beth's mom. Aunty Mia got married early, that's why Ana is older than me.Otherwise….” But a man just interrupted.

We turned around and see a man with ball shaped eyes like those really looked like ball; wearing smaller than usual round glasses on the mid-bridge of his nose with a blue half sleeved shirt and jeans.Beside him another young boy, fair toned skin; was standing in a black t-shirt and jeans.

“Won't you introduce us to her?” The young boy says keeping his hands in pockets.

“OH Yeah. Suzy it’s my brother” Ruby says, eyeing him and then lifts her hand to the old man and said “He is our granddad.”
I said hello, bowing a little bit.But he replied with “I’ve seen you after a long time. I hope the journey was well.”

I got shocked and frowned at Ruby and licked the inside edge of my lip to process the moment.That was my first time meeting ruby’s family but her granddad saw me somewhere else.I thought he was either joking or have a sickness like me.

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On the wedding day we got that hand-made bunch of baby breath flowers.I Didn't get enough sleep after coming here yesterday,I found myself yawning once and looked if anyone saw or not then I noticed not all of us came for the mass. Only the family people and close relatives came.I shouldn’t have also If I weren’t a bridesmaid.Iflinched my head back.I shouldn’t have looked around.What would he think of me now? Grandad caught me staring somewhere else instead of the bride-groom.Now for the rest of the days I need to avoid him.

After the mass we had some photoshoots and came back to the house.it’s not far away so we walked to get back.The groom and bride went somewhere else to shoot some more.

Everything was well organized now they were waiting for the bride and groom. The bar counter, music booth flowers were on table, guests started to come.Me and Loren sat at one of the back benches.I was starving so I went to the kitchen with Ruby to get some snacks.But there we bump into her granddad. That always happens;the one you try to avoid the most somehow that person just shows up to you continuously.I smiled forcefully and tried to slide walk beside him but before that he said to me “The one you were looking for you will get to see him tonight just wait.”

Who I was looking for? I don’t even know but he knows. I tried to ask Ruby if any celebrity person is coming to be sure of what her grandad is talking about.She said she doesn’t know.She didn’t even say that there is a possibility.She indirectly said no. Then who could it be?

The church father blessed the cake and food and the groom-bride, they tossed the bouquet and garter. They played the shoe game and guests continued to come and wish them. Then the announcer called everyone for a couple dance. I didn't want to go but Lily ‘s mom pushed all of us to the floor. And yes this time also we are playing a game. As the announcer said they will turn off all the lights and everyone needs to grab someone to dance. To save myself I got an idea to run from there. When the lights will get off I will just get down or go inside the house so none could grab me to dance.

The lights turned off. I turned to get down but Loren didn’t let me go. She was sure what I would do. And someone from the other side just pulled me before I could say something to Loren.The

guy was smelling like a mint freshener.I hope this man doesn't belong to someone. I am quite short in front of this man.His breaths were landing on my forehead. The lights are still off.

The music turned on. Some screamed , some laughed but I froze; when you give a lot of effort to hide something from your parents and even after that if they find out what you would feel .I am feeling that right now. I can't even step back from it now. I need to act as if it is normal.My sickness is again showing up.I am again seeing Wayne.

He is wearing a black satin shirt with cheetah skin printed collar.His hair is half parted; thick jolt of hair falling over his left eyebrow.He is smiling towards me.I don't even know who the man actually is behind that face now,but I know for sure it's not Wayne.Again, it's again happening the rise of my palpitation,my hands started to sweat, I need to run.The cold air chills me and in some moments it started to rain.I headed to the outside ; in the time everyone ran to the inside..I wanted to go under the rain; what if it would cure my sickness for temporary for taking Wayne out my sight again. I didn't want to face anyone. I wanted to be alone. I ran towards the outdoors. The concrete stairs were slippery; I leaned back and was about to fall; the railing took hold of me and I got saved.I don't know what would happen if I step outside at this time.But I don't want to go back.I need to forget about Wayne.He is not mine.He has never wanted me.He is for Jane. And I have accepted that then why my mind started to show him again and again. Is he the only person in the world for me to think about? How could I control my mind? I am out at the street.The narrow paths leading to the other narrow one and ends up gathering at the main street.I was standing still at the narrow paths looking at the main road.I felt warmth around my left wrist, a pull; I turned around.

He is totally wet.He was trying to catch his breath.But I am still.Did I run?I thought I was walking.He tried to say something but his breaths were not allowing it.

Wayne again.

I wanted to cry. I squeezed my face; clenched my dress with both my hands.But my tears forgot to fall down.

Then he goes "Why are you doing this to me? Don't you have heart inside you.Don't you feel bad to see a boy suffer.How could a girl be so harsh? I have sent flowers for you on your graduation.You were away from your home.I wanted to show up as your family that day.But you just threw the card off. Even after that I begged in front of your manager to let me sing in his restaurant; you just ignored me there too. I went to the coffee shop; back of the buildings; you used to go and sat with you, talked with you but you; the whole time you were looking here and there but not for once at me."

Silence.It was still raining.Then I felt my chin trembling,nose flaring and tears.I took out a deep sigh.I have a lot to say too,But don't know where to start.

I started to panic, swaying my right arm, circling my index finger in the right direction of where I was standing and said “Fair day. Pause.Cycle. Pause. Church gate. Pause. Basketball. Pause Letters.I bit my lip and took a deep breath. “ I have tried many ways then you to get your attention.But were always drawn to jane.And….”
“Who is Jane, now?” He asked, rolling his eyes.

“What do you mean….” I lifted my hands like *enough*

Talking just a bit made me realize he must have gotten sick after getting rejected by Jane.And two sick people would make the situation even more worse for each other. I shook my head and stepped in the house’s direction.He pulled me back.He wanted to have more talk.But I did know what would be the consequences of the talk.

An easy end of these will do good for both of us.I pushed him back. And said what I wanted to say all this time. I said on his face with no regret; with no fear of Jane. I love you. I said it clearly twice.He appeared to me as a statue after hearing that. I am still confused if he is even Wayne. But I also want to have someone beside me; stay with me for life long. What would happen if the guy turned out to be this man? I don’t even know if I am seeing his real face. But there will be someone and it’s better from having none.

And I saw that was coming. We kissed, A deep long kiss. I didn’t know I was longing for that kiss before having that.

Chapter 10

I could see only palm trees, above the trees; the fog had taken the place of sky.It's evening time.The fogs are dipped into pink-violet summary shade; yet its fog.

It's like a new beginning but with the darkness of the past.I have only seen this many palm trees in the back area of my school building.What am I doing here? My hair is tied up ; wearing a black leather jacket and a camera is hanging around my neck . After the rainy night with the boy; my mind structured him as Wayne.What now my mind wants me to know.Could it be in this way: all the things that happened with me were all in my dream and this is the reality. But from where the dream started? And why did I end up here?

Yes, it was the back area of my school.I checked the camera and the first picture that came out just sent chills through my spine.It was Ruby's grandad's young self. That;s why he used words that made me feel like *He knew me.* We met here in this fair before we did on that day. His tent was the last one I visited to take a picture. And he was reading stories to the people.Does he have something to say to me?

Now I could see red tents decorated with string lights just like the fair day; I have seen Wayne.But no one is there. I am standing at the edge of the walkway. I have two starting point.One from the left and the other from the right.I should go to the right one.Cause that's the end one.

I lift the tent curtain over my head.No one is there.But everything is decorated in the same way with the brown wooden chairs.

Finally, you came"

My hands turned into fist and both together ready to fight for self defence;I looked around.Wearing a blue shirt untucked , formal pants with a pair of black slippers; just like in the picture ; entered inside the tent, hands at the back walked to the centered chair, sat on it.

I am still staring.

"Did you recognize me?" He says, sticking an eyebrow up and seeing me with the top of his eyes.

My mouth is slightly open. "Ruby's Granddad?" I ask.

"Well not only ruby's but Lily, Beth and Ana are also my grand kids."

He shakes his head like *What* gesturing with his hands then says “Don’t you wanna ask anything?”
“I think you know what I will ask.”

“No I don’t” he straightens his back.

“Isn;t it obvious for anyone to guess what would be in my mind in this situation? Of Course I want to know why I am here? And of course I want to know how you are connected from the very beginning?”

“Beginning of what?”

I don’t have any answer.

Then he again asks the same question but tailing it unnecessarily.

“Beginning of you and Wayne’s story? Beginning of Wayne’s existence in your life? If these are your questions then yes I knew your feelings for Wayne even before it started.”

“No, it can’t be true.”

“Yes it is. I was selected by the universe to inform you about your growth.And to do that I got the vision of your future when you came into the tent on the fair day.I was shocked to see you cause I didn’t know I would meet you that day.After that I went back to my place; where you are now.”

“Here?”

“No girl.” He clicks his tongue. “I am talking about the place where Wayne is all yours.”

“Wayne never was mine.”

“It could be possible for the Universe you belonged to .But now you belong to a different Universe; where Wayne is chasing you.”

I am waving my head looking at the floor.

“In this Universe You and Wayne could live together.”

“What about jane?” I ask.

“Jane is also with Wayne in the Universe where you came from?”

“Then you are saying he is with two girls.”

“Not only two girls. He could be with many more girls in other universes. And not only him You are also with other boys in other universes”
I shrug and say “I don’t believe this.”

“You don’t have to just enjoy your life now.”

“How could it be enjoyable when I don’t know what happened to me?”

“He does a finish sign by his hands and says “ Okay let me clear it for you.Do you remember the day you came to the USA you broke your phone. That was the sign of getting transferred to a different Universe.You are living in a different Universe than the Universe you were born in.”

Honestly, it didn’t break, it just went off. And I took that for servicing to some of the shops here.But they couldn’t fix it.So I bought a new one and kept that; I don't know, somewhere in the house.

“Then what about my family?”

“Did you ever realize any day that you are not talking to your mom?”

“No”

“Then , for you only Wayne has changed in this new Universe.So, congratulations! Everyone doesn’t get the opportunity.”

“Why did I get it?”

“Did you ever express anything to Wayne?Did you go up to him and tell him that you loved him? Did you cry when you got to know he loves Jane? Did you cry when you saw the letter from him for Jane?” He asks while keeping a slight smile on his face.

I try to go through everything.

“You didn’t. But your feeling needed to express itself, it needed to come outside and it just got blast inside you and influenced the Universe to take steps for you.”

A sound echoes with my name.I look around to find out where it was coming from.

But Loren’s call was enough to make me out of the dream.And I am here in the reality or in the reality created by me .

After I woke up that day I saw all of them Beth, Ana, Lily, Ruby, Loren looking at me.At first, I jumped up at the view but then they started to ask about Wayne and somehow they got to know the last night incident.But no, later I found that I needed to get updated about the last night.I had

fallen asleep on him. I remember we were sitting leaning against a wall after the rain stopped; talking about what we did for each other to get noticed by each other. But that time I was uncertain if that was even Wayne.So I couldn't focus on her words and I think that's how I fell asleep and ended up at the back area of the school.

To survey each of the things my dream version of grandad had said. I first went to him.He was relaxing on the backyard chair. I didn't know what to say.But he did. I asked how he got into my dream.He said it was his another self and laughed like saying to me *you silly girl.*

Another self.We all have that another self doing different things at the same time.

Finally Wayne is mine; the Wayne I got, was the 2nd version of him; I have seen in my life; but in two different Universes. Maybe all the things had happened in my head. But I have experienced it. So I believe it.The crazy thing is Wayne also wants me in his life.

I don't know how he ended up at my house that night.I don't know how he is in the USA. I don't know if he is also aware of me; the other self of suzy.I don't even know how he came to the wedding.I only know that this Wayne loves me back.It's enough for me to go up to him right now, and get married.

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